



**An Ecocritical Inquiry into the Kantian Aspects of
John Maxwell Coetzee's Animal Ethics**

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter I	
Major Ecocritical Approaches to Literature	10
1.1. The Origins of Ecocriticism as a Critical Study of Literature	11
1.2. Cornucopia	22
1.3. Shallow Environmentalism	24
1.4. Deep Ecology	25
1.5. Ecofeminism	27
1.6. Social Ecology	28
1.7. Postcolonial Eco-Theories	29
1.8. Heideggerian Eco-Philosophy	30
1.9. The Culture-Nature Dichotomy	32
1.10. The Metaphors of Nature Writing	34
1.10.1. Pollution	36
1.10.2. The Pastoral	37
1.10.3. Wilderness	38
1.10.4. Apocalypse	41
1.10.5. Dwelling	42
1.10.6. Animals	45
Chapter II	
Environmental Philosophy, Animal Ethics, and Kant's Transcendental Illusion ..	53
2.1. The Twentieth-Century Environment Philosophy	54
2.2. The Logic of Kantian Transcendental Illusion	78
2.3. Kant's Philosophy in Relation to the Contemporary Environmental Issues	90
2.4. Philosophy and Animal Ethics	100
Chapter III	
John Maxwell Coetzee's Critique of Rationalism: A Dialectical Perspective	111
3.1. Coetzee's Critique of Thought-Experiments	112
3.2. Coetzee's Critique of Thought-Experiments as Presented in <i>The Lives of Animals</i>	120
3.3. Dialectics in Light of Richard E. Nisbett's Research	138
3.4. The Origins of the Schemas of Behavior	144
3.5. Formal Logic and Eastern Dialectics	146

3.6. Kant and Eastern Dialectics	149
3.7. Coetzee's Harmony of Opposites	156

Chapter IV

Critique of Rationalism in the Novels of John Maxwell Coetzee	166
4.1. Coetzee's "Fictionalized Memoir"	166
4.2. <i>Dusklands</i>	168
4.3. <i>In the Heart of the Country</i>	170
4.4. <i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i>	174
4.5. <i>Life and Times of Michael K</i>	190
4.6. <i>Foe</i>	201
4.7. <i>Age of Iron</i>	208
4.8. <i>The Master of Petersburg</i>	214
4.9. <i>Elizabeth Costello</i>	221
4.10. <i>Disgrace</i>	230
4.11. <i>Slow Man</i>	241
4.12. <i>Diary of a Bad Year</i> and <i>The Childhood of Jesus</i>	245

Chapter V

The Sympathetic Imagination and Coetzee's Wider Conception of Rationality ...	250
5.1. Coetzee's Wider Conception of Rationality	251
5.2. Coetzee and the Keatsian Understanding of the Sympathetic Imagination	260
5.3. Development of the Sympathetic imagination in Coetzee's Work	274
5.4. The Limits of the Sympathetic Imagination	296
5.5. <i>Slow Man</i> : The Sympathetic Imagination and the Limits of Reciprocity	302
5.6. Coetzee's Further Critique of the Sympathetic Imagination	309
5.7. Imagination and the Ethical Role of Literature	312

Chapter VI

John Maxwell Coetzee's Animal Ethics and the Possibilities of the Sympathetic Imagination	321
6.1. The Possibilities of the Sympathetic Imagination.....	322
6.2. Coetzee's Animal Ethics	345
6.3. The Ethics of Animal Death	372
6.4. The Ethics of Animal Undeath	378

Conclusion	392
Bibliography	405
Appendix	425

Introduction

In his three novels, *The Lives of Animals* (1999), *Disgrace* (1999), and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), John Maxwell Coetzee (b. 1940), a South African novelist and literary critic, explores the relation between people and animals, challenging the idea of human supremacy over nature. His analysis inscribes in the debate concerning the moral status of animals and the possibilities of limiting their suffering despite an increasing demand for animal products. The main focus of Coetzee's investigations are literature and the faculty of imaginative insight into the perspectives of other beings. His efforts have been recognized by the Nobel committee of the Swedish Academy who, upon awarding him a Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003, praised his work for portraying “the surprising involvement of the outsider,”¹ referring both to people and to animals. Coetzee can be considered an important voice in the discussions concerning the human-animal interdependency and man's duties to the natural world.

The debate regarding the ethical status of animals originates in Antiquity when it was first theorized by Plato (c. 472-348 BC), a founder of Western philosophy. Advocating the immortality of human soul, Plato argued that people could reincarnate into other beings, including animals. He also claimed that animals could reincarnate into people. Therefore, he condemned harming animals and eating meat because, given the reincarnation argument, human carnivorousness could turn out a cannibalistic practice. Moreover, Plato

1 “The Nobel Prize in Literature 2003 to John Maxwell Coetzee,” Nobel Media 2014, accessed September 20, 2016, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2003/.

praised nature as a holistic and orderly system whose stability should be the purpose of all people. He applied an equal status to both people and animals.²

Plato's ideas were challenged by his disciple Aristotle (384-322) who contested equalizing humans with animals, grading the whole of creation into a hierarchy. He called the hierarchy "the scale of nature" and put man at its top, arguing that people deserved a privileged position because they possessed rational souls responsible for thought and reflection. Animals were lower in the scale because they were equipped only with sensitive souls in control of instincts, mobility, and sentience. The scale's bottom was occupied by entities possessing vegetative souls responsible for the simplest bodily functions, such as reproduction and growth. At the lowest end of Aristotle's hierarchy, there were objects like rocks and mountains, that is, entities devoid of any type of soul. Such a hierarchical view of the world had a substantial impact on the development of Western thought. Nearly all the post-Aristotelian philosophers, among them St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), based their theories upon the assumption that the natural was subordinate to the human. A few notable exceptions include Polphyry (c. 232-305) and St. Francis of Assisi (c. 1181-1226). Polphyry, a vegetarian, condemned the practice of animal sacrifice. He argued that animals should be spared pain and suffering. St. Francis saw animals as equal to people. He believed humans and animals to be partners. However, neither Polphyry nor St. Francis gained much following, thus their influence on the Western view of animals was limited.³

At the beginning of modernity, René Descartes (1591-1650), a French philosopher, mathematician and writer, differentiated between human and nonhuman beings on the basis of their aptitude for rational thinking. In his 1637 treatise, *Discourse on the Method*,

2 Gabriela R. Carone, "The Classical Greek Tradition," in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Dale Jamieson (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 72-73.

3 Charles Taliaferro, "Early Modern Philosophy," in Jamieson, *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 130-132; Marc Cohen, "Aristotle on the Soul," accessed February 1, 2013, <http://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/320/psyche.htm>.

Descartes argued that “the beasts [not merely] have less reason than man, but [...] they have no reason at all.”⁴ He expanded his theory by claiming that animals were mere automata and, as such, they could be exploited by people without any ethical limitations. To further justify his view, he maintained that animal pain and suffering were mechanical responses to external stimuli, therefore, they should not be considered as ethically binding. Moreover, in his theory of the body-soul dualism, he argued that body and soul could exist without each other. Accordingly, in Descartes' view, people had very little in common with nature because non-human beings lacked souls, whereas people could exist only as souls. It was not until the emergence of the theory of evolution in the nineteenth century that the Cartesian dualism between man and nature was questioned.⁵

In his 1871 work, *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin (1809-1882), a British naturalist and geologist, argued that people and other creatures were of the same origin; they underwent the same natural processes, sharing the same goal to survive. In Darwin's view, people had never departed from nature; on the contrary, they remained its inseparable part. Not only were people part of nature, but being unable to exist beyond it, they were also dependent on nature. In a sense, science made a circle and returned to the ancient idea of a homogenous world in which humans and animals were participants of the same natural processes.⁶

Due to Darwin's abundant and well analyzed evidence for the shared origins of man and animals, people became more aware of their inextricable connection with the natural world. However, that awareness was disturbed by the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century during which people began to perceive nature as a reservoir of resources designated for human unlimited use. The ensuing technological and social

4 René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason, and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, trans. Robert Stoothoff, in vol. 1 of *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 140.

5 Taliaferro, “Early Modern Philosophy,” 137-138.

6 Ibid., 143-144.

progress intensified the consumerism of the capitalistic model of market economy, resulting in a significant exploitation of natural reserves, environmental pollution and climate change.

One of the most seminal thinkers of the twentieth century who approached the necessity to reevaluate man's relation to nature as part of a greater philosophical project was the German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). He declined Descartes' idea that the universe was a lifeless clockwork mechanism which could endlessly be exploited, and that all living beings, except for people, could be used regardless of their individual interests. Instead, Heidegger argued that people and nature remained in a mutually-beneficial dynamics. On the one hand, nature provided the space for humans to conduct their activities; on the other hand, human activities “disclosed” nature, that is, any natural entity would start its existence as soon as it emerged in human consciousness. Accordingly, in Heidegger's view, a thing existed as long as someone was conscious of it, and it ceased to exist, when it was forgotten, taken for granted or ignored.

Heidegger argued that poetry was one of the most effective means of making objects of nature emerge in human consciousness. In his view, poetry not only “disclosed” nature, but it also made people more concerned about its state. Therefore, although poetry certainly may not limit consumerism, it could encourage people to protect the environment, or at least to prevent its destruction. In the second half of the twentieth century, the Heideggerian view of poetry's role in making man appreciate the natural world became a tenet of ecocriticism, the critical study of literary representations of nature.⁷

Despite recognizing man's reliance on nature, Heidegger's view was anthropocentric. Nature needed people, especially the human language, primarily because it supplied the

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (1959; New York: Harper Perennial Classics 2001), 103.

ontological space in which nature could emerge as an idea. In other words, nature would not exist if it were not for humans and their ability to conceptualize the reality. An example of Heideggerian anthropocentrism toward animals is provided by the twentieth-century French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995). During his imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp, Lévinas befriended a dog called Bobby. His encounter with Bobby is recalled in the following passage:

And then, about halfway through our long captivity, for a few short weeks, before the sentinels chased him away, a wandering dog entered our lives. One day he came to meet this rabble as we returned under guard from work. He survived in some wild patch in the region of the camp. But we called him Bobby, an exotic name, as one does with a cherished dog. He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men.⁸

According to Lévinas, unlike most passers-by, only a dog, Bobby, did not pretend not to see the prisoners working outside the camp. In contrast to the Western philosophical tradition, Lévinas did not speak of the dog from a position of dominance; instead, he perceived it in its own right, as an independent agency. It can be argued that Lévinas placed the dog in the centre of humanity, opposing Western anthropocentrism.

However, immediately after his reflection over the man-animal relationship, Lévinas returned to the man-centered mindset, claiming that Bobby was “without the brain needed to universalize maxims and drives.”⁹ In Lévinas's opinion, animals have no “face,” that is, they neither have ethical value, nor can recognize it in other beings, therefore, Bobby could not acknowledge the prisoners' humanity. The egalitarian view of animals caused by Bobby's presence was eventually discarded by Lévinas as anthropomorphic and misguided.¹⁰

⁸ Emmanuel Lévinas, “The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights,” in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1990), 153.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Cf. Emmanuel Lévinas, “The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas,” by Tamara Wright, Peter Hughes, Alison Ainley, in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, trans. Andrew Benjamin and Tamara Wright, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge,

In his 1997 Cerisy-la-Salle address, published under the title “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), a French semiotician, argued that Lévinas's return to the conventional view of animality confirmed the Western tendency of disregarding animals as non-significant. For Derrida, Lévinas's difficulties in recognizing animal worth testified to Lévinas's insufficient sympathy, or to his limited ability to imagine oneself from another's perspective. The difficulty is characteristic of most European thinkers, which Derrida points to in the following excerpt:

[The thinkers'] discourses [on the animal] are sound and profound, but everything goes on as if they themselves had never been looked at [...] by an animal that addressed them [...] as though this troubling experience had not been theoretically registered [...] at the precise moment when they made of the animal a *theorem*, something seen and not seeing.¹¹

Following Derrida, it could be argued that Lévinas did not experience a “seeing animal,” that is, an animal actively looking at him from its own autonomous position, therefore, he eventually misrepresented Bobby, reinforcing the Western anthropocentric mode of thinking.

According to Peter Singer (b. 1946), an Australian utilitarian ethicist, the Western ignorance of animals could be interpreted as speciesism, i.e., “a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species.”¹² Singer claims that speciesism derives from the anthropocentrism of the Western idea of animality. Analyzing Western speciesism, Timothy Clark, a University of Durham scholar, raises the question of “how to represent animal lives in human language and culture without illusion and injustice.”¹³ Clark argues

1988), 169, 171-2.

11 Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Winter 2002): 383.

12 Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals*, 2nd ed. (1975; New York: New York Review Books/Random House, 1990), 6.

13 Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 179.

that the question refers mainly to the rhetorics of animality in popular culture, science, literature, and different modes of artistic expression. Derrida refers to the question by arguing that “thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry [while] philosophy has, essentially, had to deprive itself of it.”¹⁴ In Derrida's view, animals have obtained their proper recognition in the literary mode of expression, especially poetry, not science or philosophy.

According to Tom Herron, a Leeds Beckett University scholar, John Maxwell Coetzee “restates Derrida’s distinction between the inert animal of philosophy and the multiple lives of animals in poetry,”¹⁵ especially in *The Lives of Animals*, *Disgrace*, and *Elizabeth Costello*. Similarly to Lévinas, Coetzee recognizes the humanizing aspect of animality, yet unlike Lévinas, he avoids overriding the recognition with Western anthropocentrism. Coetzee also draws upon the Derridean idea of literature as the place where the humanizing status of animality cannot only be expressed but also subjected to ethical consideration. Moreover, although concerned with animal welfare, Coetzee does not seem to advocate animal rights, nor is he interested in stories of personal expiation. Rather, he investigates the nature of the man-animal relationship, paying ample attention to its ethical aspects. Contrary to Lévinas, who denied moral importance to animals, Coetzee at least considers the possibility of ethical value of animals.

It could be argued that Coetzee’s novels are based on the assumption that successful animal ethics depends on developed humanism, therefore, the novels are aimed at refining the reader’s sensitivity and moral character. In Coetzee's view, literature enhances people's moral response by developing their imagination and sympathy for other beings, including animals. In this sense, Coetzee follows the urge of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the German philosopher, to constantly develop one’s humanity through morally proper

¹⁴ Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” 377.

¹⁵ Tom Herron, “The Dog Man: Becoming Animal in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 470.

treatment not only of people, but also of animals. Similarly to Kant, Coetzee argues that exposure to nature and art, especially poetry, can improve people's morality and their sympathy for other beings. The exposure mediates one's anthropocentrism, sensitizing to the non-rational modes of cognitive insight, such as imagination, intuition and emotions.

Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998), a French postmodern philosopher and literary critic, argued that non-rational insight improved one's understanding and the cognitive possibilities of reason. In his 1979 work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard referred to the inclusion of intuition, sensitivity, and imagination among reason's cognitive faculties as paralogy. The term has a Greek etymology and it denotes a conceptual move “beyond reason” (*para* – beyond, *logos* – reason). Hence, paralogy designates a defiance against reason. It stands for the production of new concepts by challenging the established norms and standards of enquiry. In Lyotard's theory, paralogy denotes an attempt at revealing the unknown. It could be argued that paralogy aims at exposing what rationalistic anthropocentric philosophy has deemed insignificant or redundant.¹⁶

The argument of the present dissertation is that Coetzee tests Western anthropocentrism by probing into the mythologies surrounding animality, especially those functioning in the contemporary philosophical discourse. An attempt will be made to relate Coetzee's ideas to the discussions concerning the ethical status of animals, man's obligations to animals, and the nature of the man-animal relationship. Particular emphasis will be placed on Coetzee's critique of rationalism and his view of literature as a paralogical means of enhancing the understanding of animals. It will be argued that the South African novelist enriches rationalism by exploring the possibilities of the sympathetic imagination. The idea of the sympathetic imagination originates in

¹⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (1979; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 60-67.

Romanticism, and it refers to the literary mode of introspecting others' points of view in order to understand or to interpret their thoughts and feelings. Coetzee draws mainly upon the notion of the sympathetic imagination discussed by the English poet John Keats (1795-1821) in his 1818 "Letter to Richard Woodhouse." According to Keats, the sympathetic imagination is used by authors, poets, and artists to better understand and depict the subjects of their creativity. It can also be argued that the sympathetic imagination allows the authors and the readers to improve their moral response by stimulating their empathy to another.¹⁷

In the dissertation, it will be argued that John Maxwell Coetzee's use of the sympathetic imagination parallels the logic of Kant's transcendental illusion. An attempt will be made to correlate Coetzee's criticism of rationalism and thought experiments with Kant's critique of reason, especially with the notion of the transcendental illusion. The study will also relate Coetzee's animal ethics to the Kantian concepts of mutual reciprocity, disinterestedness, and the aesthetic judgement. The following analysis attempts to contribute to Coetzee's ideal of acknowledging the multiple aspects of the man-animal interdependency without being anthropocentrically biased.

The general purpose of the dissertation is to demonstrate the Kantian elements of Coetzee's animal ethics. An application of Kant's thought to the discussion about the ethical value of animals cannot disregard the philosopher's anthropocentric views, particularly visible in his ethics. Despite his anthropocentrism, however, Kant's thought seems to provide a reliable basis for developing a successful ethics of animality. Therefore, the following analysis will draw upon Kant's thought, exposing his philosophy's potential for legitimating people's ethical obligations to animals.

17 John Keats, "To Richard Woodhouse," 27 Oct. 1818, in *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Grant Scott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 194.

Chapter I

Major Ecocritical Approaches to Literature

In the “Introduction” to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), the first significant anthology of environmentally-oriented studies of literature, Cheryll Glotfelty (b. 1958), an associate professor of literature and the environment at the University of Nevada, Reno, provided the following definition of ecocriticism:

Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies.¹

“Place,” in addition to gender, class, and race, has become a new cultural category, and ecocriticism is a scholarly attempt at defining its emanations in literature. Moreover, as the comparison with Marxism and feminism suggests, ecocriticism is a profoundly political mode of analysis. Richard Kerridge, a British scholar from Bath Spa University, argues that “ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis.”² In Kerridge's understanding, ecocriticism has an ethical component; not only does it deal with the literary representations of the emerging ecological threats, but it also investigates how people react to the threats. The aim of the present chapter is, firstly, to discuss the political and ethical

1 Cheryll Glotfelty, “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), xviii.

2 Richard Kerridge, introduction to *Writing the Environment*, ed. Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (London: Zed Books, 1998), 5.

aspects of ecocriticism; secondly, to present the major approaches to the environmental crisis adopted by ecocritics during their literary investigations; and, thirdly, to analyze the key rhetorical strategies, or metaphors, identified by ecocritics as the recurring literary modes of imagining, presenting, and reproducing nature as a narrative figure. Although in its broadest application ecocriticism extends onto other forms of artistic and cultural activity, the current discussion will concentrate specifically on literature. The chapter will also present a brief introduction into the conceptual background of ecocriticism.

1.1. The Origins of Ecocriticism as a Critical Study of Literature

The term “ecocriticism” was introduced by William Rueckert, an American literary studies scholar who in his 1978 essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” defined it as “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature.”³ In Rueckert's view, ecocriticism drew solely upon the science of ecology, thus it was not part of cultural studies, philosophy, or aesthetics. The fundamental premise of ecocriticism was to evaluate the manner in which literature was influenced by the environment and by the interaction between man and nature. Rueckert argued that literature was part of the biosphere by participating in the natural process of energy distribution. Novels, plays, and poems functioned as depositories of energy, transferred through writing, reading, and criticism, and eventually released under the form of pro-environmental activism. The task of ecocriticism was to investigate the intertextual flow of energy. Rueckert based his views on the assumption that literary works, as any other cultural artifacts, were integral components of the natural environment. However, ecocritics soon abandoned Rueckert's descriptive understanding of ecocriticism, adopting

3 William Rueckert, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism,” in Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, 107.

its normative definition derived from scientific research and philosophical reflections over the reasons and consequences of the current environmental crisis.⁴

Christopher Manes (b. 1957), a scholar of the University of California at Berkeley, argued in his 1992 article “Nature and Science” that literature, together with art, religion, and tradition were the most efficient means of reproducing the myths and patterns of thinking which legitimated human dominance over nature. Throughout centuries, writers, poets, and playwrights either ignored or underestimated the value of nature; they frequently depicted the environment as requiring little attention. According to Manes, such anthropocentrism portrayed nature as insignificant and subject to unrestrained utilization in Western culture. The Industrial Revolution, which was followed by a rapid advancement in technology, a growth of urban populations, and an excessive use of natural resources, intensified the exploitation of nature, leading to the contemporary problems with ecological sustainability. Admittedly, while the environmental crisis is partially due to such factors as pollution and consumerism, it has also been caused by man's culturally handicapped capability to appreciate the seriousness of environmental issues, to consider the threats emerging in nature as demanding immediate attention, and to recognize eco-ethics as part of general ethics. The role of ecocriticism is to investigate how literature has influenced people's understanding of the man-nature relationship and whether the extent of the influence has been mediated by other factors.⁵

Since one of the main reasons for the environmental crisis is people's perception of their obligations to the surrounding world, the task of ecocriticism is to examine the ethical structure underlying the man-nature interrelationship. Donald Worster, a University of Kansas historian and one of the leading figures in the field of environmental history, argues that examination is the most important task of ecocriticism:

4 Glotfelty, “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” xxii.

5 Christopher Manes, “Nature and Science,” *Environmental Ethics* 14 (Winter 1992).

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists, and philosophers, cannot do the reforming, of course, but they can help with the understanding.⁶

Apart from conducting critical literary research, Worster argues that ecocriticism should also promote ecological activism. In his view, ecocriticism is not a mere philosophical or theoretical stance but an active social attitude. Unlike much of academic discourse, it is practical; instead of drawing boundaries between natural sciences and humanities, it merges them by promoting a shared effort to counteract the environmental crisis. Ecocriticism is both a political and ethical mode of literary analysis.

The political and ethical aspect of ecocriticism becomes more evident in the conceptual difference between the “problems in ecology” and an “ecological problem.” The distinction has been proposed by John Passmore (1914-2004), an Australian professor of English literature and philosophy, who claimed that the term “problems in ecology” referred to specific scientific issues, researched and resolved by empirical examination and experiment, whereas “ecological problems” should be understood as the “features of our society, arising out of our dealings with nature, from which we should like to free ourselves, and which we do not regard as inevitable consequences of what is good in that society.”⁷ To refer to a natural phenomenon as “a problem in ecology” is to provide a descriptive claim, without any normative qualification, or prescriptive judgement. In this sense, if a growing concentration of carbon dioxide in the air is considered a piece of scientific data, it means that it is “a problem in ecology.” However, an “increasing air pollution” or “impoverished cornfield ecosystems” are “ecological problems” because the

6 Donald Worster, *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 27.

7 John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (London: Duckworth, 1974), 44.

phrases are normative claims indicating what the desired state of things should be like; “increasing air pollution” denotes clean air, whereas “impoverished cornfield ecosystems” refers to rich ecosystems. The main objective of ecocriticism is to investigate what is designated by literature as the “ecological problems.” Another objective is to turn the “problems in ecology” into “ecological problems,” and to emotionally involve people in the transformation. In the ecocritical paradigm, statements describing the condition of the environment should be supplemented with normative claims designating various types of ecologically-right behavior. Accordingly, while ecocriticism “cannot contribute much to debates about problems in ecology,”⁸ it can prompt ecological issues to political, legal, and ethical reconsideration.

While ecology, philosophy, and ethics make people comprehend the mechanisms of their interaction with the surrounding world, ecocriticism reveals that literature is one of the most efficient means of communicating the scientific findings to large audiences. David W. Orr (b. 1944), an American environmental studies and politics scholar, professor at Oberlin College, Ohio, in his *Ecological Literacy* (1992) argues that historians, philosophers, and natural scientists have significantly contributed to the improvement in understanding the environmental crisis as well as in counteracting its further spread. In Orr's view, they have also synthesized academic knowledge into a coherent and approachable system, thus promoting a more conscious and pro-ecological lifestyle. Scott Slovic (b. 1960), a professor at the University of Idaho, develops Orr's ideas by arguing that writers, poets, and other literary authors have frequently been leaders in exploring and communicating scientific discoveries to other people. He maintains that they have informed about the environmental crisis by writing about the consequences of the anthropogenic changes to the Earth's ecosystem. It can be claimed that literature has importantly contributed to the realization of Orr's ideas. Not only does literature

8 Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 6.

familiarize the public with the discoveries in natural sciences, but it also provides space for discussions about eco-ethics and environmental philosophy, sensitizing people to the so-called eco-values.⁹

In this sense, not only ecocriticism but also literature as an object of ecocritical study turns “problems in ecology” into “ecological problems.” While environmental writing popularizes eco-values by the artistic means of literary creation, ecocriticism – by investigating and understanding the former's imagery, and, if applicable, its eco-ethical background. The objective of ecocriticism is particularly important because there are a substantial number of authors concerned with the ethical aspects of the environmental crisis whose work is little explored and lacking due scholarly attention. James S. Hans (b. 1950), a professor of English from Wake Forest University, in his *The Value(s) of Literature* (1990) argues that literary critics do not consider literature as a source of eco-values, therefore, they argue “that there is no place in 'serious scholarship' to evaluate these 'outside' [environmental] concerns.”¹⁰ In Hans's view, scholars and literary critics should realize that there is “an ethical component” to literature, and to “limit our discussion of it to its 'literariness' is to denude it of its crucial links to the other systems that combine to articulate our sense of values.”¹¹ The awareness of the “ethical component” is one of the fundamental premises of ecocriticism.

Kerridge's idea of ecocriticism as an ethical and political mode of analysis can now be extended to literature itself for, as implicated by Scott Slovic, numerous literary works function as an ethically and politically engaged means of stimulating socio-cultural interactions. In his 1987 essay “Owning it All,” William Kittredge (b. 1932), an American literary writer and critic from Portland, Oregon, praises the reconstructive potential of

9 David W. Orr, *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Translation to a Postmodern World* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 83, 100-102; Scott Slovic, “Literature,” in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Dale Jamieson (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 251-254.

10 James S. Hans, *The Value(s) of Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 2.

11 Ibid., 15.

literature by arguing that writers can revise, re-model, and re-imagine the received mythology, understood as “a story that contains a set of implicit instructions from a society to its members.”¹² In Kittredge's view, literature can serve as a means of communicating new values. By recreating the received modes of thinking, literature can also alter the manner in which people perceive and organize the reality. Such a remodeling of thinking standards is important because, according to Kittredge, “only after re-imagining our myths can we coherently remodel our law, and hope to keep our society in a realistic relationship to what is actual.”¹³ In a sense, literary authors participate in activities aiming at counteracting the environmental threat, which Slovic confirms by claiming that writers “understand their work as the effort to achieve not only aesthetic brilliance, but an understanding of human society's 'realistic relationship' to the actualities of the planet.”¹⁴ Admittedly, environmental literature should affect people's attitudes and serve as means to re-evaluating their systems of values, mainly by engaging them in ecological activism. Barry Lopez (b. 1945), an American novelist known for his fiction about humanitarian and environmental issues, claims that a political and ethical engagement in moral concerns ought to be demanded from literature. In a tone of a warning, Lopez writes:

[...] if art is merely decorative or entertaining, or even just aesthetically brilliant, if it does not elicit hope or a sense of the sacred, it does not speak to our fear and confusion, or to the capacities for memory and passion that imbue us with our humanity, then the artist has only sent us a letter that requires no answer.¹⁵

The social responsibility of artists and writers is to extend their creative involvement from a mere interest in achieving “aesthetic brilliance” to the point of confronting contemporary moral issues. Otherwise, claims Lopez, the role of art and literature would have to be

12 William Kittredge, “Owning it All,” in *Owning It All*, ed. William Kittredge (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 1987), 62.

13 Ibid., 64.

14 Slovic, “Literature,” 253.

15 Barry Lopez, *Allan Magee: Inlets* (Portland, ME: The John Whitney Payson Gallery of Art, Westbrook Collage, 1990), 1.

deemed as hardly significant and redundant.

Although contemporary environmentalist authors lack Lopez's radicalism, they seem to agree that the purpose of art and literature should be rethought, especially that the environmental crisis poses a significant threat to people's sustainability. Henry Thoreau (1817-1862), an American writer and philosopher, in his *Walden* (1854), a collection of reflections upon living in plain natural surroundings, encouraged to redefine the goals of literature by making it more involved in popularizing environmental values. He recognized that the redefinition might be particularly demanding, especially that environmental values are abstract and difficult to describe in fiction. However, contemporary ecocritics claim that fiction writers ought to propagate taking care of nature as literature is one of the few disciplines that can successfully familiarize people with the nonhuman part of the world. Through its fictional, allegorist, and didactic character, literature draws the reader's attention to the intricacies of the man-nature relationship; it pinpoints details and meanings that evade other disciplines. Thoreau acknowledged the illuminative function of literature by describing his own literary attempts in *Walden* as “somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening [,] a little star-dust caught, a [clutched] segment of the rainbow.”¹⁶

There is much controversy about the research conducted by ecologists, environmentalists, and eco-ethic thinkers because a substantial part of their discoveries undermines the standard patterns of thinking and social behavior. It is difficult for many worldwide consumers to see the need to take care of their waste and limit their consumption. They rarely understand the necessity of protecting endangered species, especially those occupying uninhabited areas. Few people in the West would agree to refrain from large-scale tourism, even though mass traveling poses a considerable

16 Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. Jim Manis (1854; The Pensilvania State University: An Electronic Classics Series Publication, 2006-2013), 171.

ecological threat to the visited areas. Vegetarianism is still rather unpopular because a substantial number of consumers do not consider meat-free diet to be healthy or natural for people. Moreover, contemporary consumerist culture often ignores the fate of future generations whose well-being is endangered by the present growth in pollution and greenhouse emissions. There is also a considerable uncertainty about the origins of the climate change. The efficacy of the so-called green energy is subject to further analysis, and a massive exploitation of natural resources proves to be the only economically justified source of raw materials. Since indifference can be dangerous, particularly when it concerns the fundamentals of life, the challenge taken on by the environmentally-conscious authors and ecocritics is to encourage their readers to become involved in nature conservation by making them realize that the scientific warnings about the environmental crisis are essential for every single human being, and for the whole world. Scott Slovic argues that the task of “nature writers” is to communicate the character of people's relationship to the rest of the natural world in an understandable and convincing way. He claims that the role of literature is to give meaning to the scientific data which, due to its formalized and impersonal character, is often perceived as lacking personal engagement.¹⁷

Accordingly, in order for a scientific fact to animate common imagination, it should be turned into an “ecological problem,” a normative concept which both carries a meaning and gives rise to particular human emotions, encouraging people to engage in pro-ecological activity. It is the role of art, and particularly of literature, to change the epistemological aspect of scientific research into a normative one. The reason why literature affects people more successfully than science or academic disciplines is because, according to Slovic, “images are more impressive than statistics – they have an immediate impact on the audience, and they stick in readers' minds.”¹⁸ Consequently, the normative

¹⁷ Slovic, “Literature,” 254.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 260.

character of literature derives from its aesthetic value. By means of language, narration, and literary tropes, literature makes people notice certain facts, processes and phenomena; since recognition is the first and necessary step towards understanding and actual action, literature is more effective in inducing people to protect the environmental than science as science rarely evokes aesthetic response or provides aesthetic fulfillment. Accordingly, the task of environmentally-minded authors is to make people notice and respond to the environmental crisis by providing the reader with aesthetic gratification. Otherwise, Orr's requirements are not accomplished, Lopez's call for useful literature is neglected, and the pro-environmental writer's creative effort is wasted.¹⁹

The role of ecocriticism is to investigate how environmental literature complies with eco-ethical values. Ecocriticism analyses the received canon and traces the writer's attempts at revising it. Therefore, while ecocriticism examines how literature approaches the new questions about ecology and the environmental crisis, it explores the manner in which writers both create interest in nature and encourage ecologically-oriented activism among their readers. Moreover, ecocriticism is an eclectic discipline; scholars engaged in it are frequently associated with diverse disciplines; they are affiliated with various institutions, and they often work independently of each other. There are eco-theoreticians who investigate how literature takes up social responsibilities and how it stimulates interest in nature. A number of ecocritics analyze the mechanisms of the linguistic representation of nature and of the man-nature co-existence. Some of them approach texts about the environment through the cultural-historical perspectives. There is also a group of ecocritics interested in how literature identifies and sets new priorities for both writers and readers. The challenges that ecocritics undertake are numerous and frequently distanced from each other. On the one hand, a variety of perspectives and approaches enriches the research, on the other hand, however, it means that ecocriticism has no distinctive

¹⁹ John Andrew Fisher, "Aesthetics," in Jamieson, *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 265-267.

methodology. Accordingly, a University of Durham scholar, Timothy Clark, defines ecocriticism in the following way:

Ecocriticism makes up the arena of an exciting and imponderable intersection of issues, intellectual disciplines and politics. Its potential force is to be not just another subset of literary criticism, situated within its given institutional borders, but work engaged provocatively both with literary analysis and with issues that are simultaneously but obscurely matters of science, morality, politics and aesthetics.²⁰

While for Thoreau such indeterminacy of environmental criticism might have been an advantage in the sense of being “*extra-vagant*,” exceeding the boundaries of academic disciplines and usual patterns of thought, there is a danger that a lack of institutional placing may lead to the disintegration of the movement.²¹

The early ecocritical theories, predominantly published in the nineteen-seventies and early nineteen-eighties, were not recognized as belonging to any specific critical school. Instead, they were categorized under a variety of subject headings, ranging from American studies and regionalism, through pastoralism, regionalism and literature, to human ecology and science. In the twentieth century, the first ecocriticism scholars were mostly unaware of each other's existence; they did not cite each other's output and they worked in isolation with little support. Consequently, the major academic institutions, among them the Modern Language Association, did not acknowledge the emerging environmental studies in literature as a distinct critical movement. Those inadequacies had serious implications for those graduate students who wished to do research in both environment and literature. They were isolated and their voice was unheard.²²

It was not until the late nineteen-eighties that individual ecocritical scholars collaborated to form new associations and to popularize ecocritical studies in the

20 Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 8.

21 Thoreau, *Walden*, 253.

22 Glotfelty, “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” xvii.

academia. Frederick O. Waage (1906-1985), professor of archeology and history of art, affiliated with Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, presented in his 1985 volume *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources* the first comprehensive curriculum for university courses in environmental literature.²³ In 1989, Alicia Nitecki (b. 1942), an American author and professor of English from Bentley University, Massachusetts, began publishing *The American Writing Newsletter* consisting of short essays, book reviews, classroom notes, and information about the study of literature and nature. At the turn of the nineteen-nineties, there started to appear special issues of humanistic journals dedicated to writing about the environment and nature. In 1990, the University of Nevada, Reno, offered the first academic position in Literature and the Environment. In 1992, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was formed. Scott Slovic was elected its first president. Since its foundation, the mission of the ASLE has been to encourage an interdisciplinary study of nature as presented in literature, art, film, ecocritical scholarship, and science publications.²⁴ Today, the ASLE is one of the most active and fastest growing organizations grouping scholars, activists, and people professionally interested in cultural and literary approaches to nature. Accordingly, although initially dispersed and ignored, in the last decade of the twentieth century, ecologically informed literary studies in English became a nation-wide critical movement in the USA, forming new associations and, eventually, establishing new journals, among them *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environments*, founded in 1993 to facilitate critical investigations into literature and performing arts addressing environmental issues.²⁵ Significantly, ecocritical studies was not limited to the US, but it also spread to other parts of the world, especially to Western Europe, Canada

23 Cf. Frederic O. Waage, *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources*, ed. Frederic O. Waage (New York: MLA, 1985).

24 See Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, accessed 20 February 2014, <http://www.asle.org/site/home/>.

25 See Glotfelty, "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," xviii.

and Australia. However, it was not until the 1996 publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader*, the first comprehensive anthology of American studies in the environment and literature, that ecocriticism was eventually established as a distinct analytical approach to both literature and nature.

Ever since its beginnings in the nineteen-seventies, its formation in the late nineteen-eighties, and its development in the nineteen-nineties, ecocriticism has remained an eclectic critical movement comprising a variety of approaches, disciplines, and research methods. Scholars engaged in ecocritical studies have evolved as a separate research group. They have founded various journals, managing to stay intellectually independent and unlimited by disciplinary boundaries. Due its internal diversity, ecocriticism has developed a variety of distinctive approaches to the environmental crisis.

1.2. Cornucopia

Greg Garrard, a University of Columbia scholar, presented the approaches in his 2012 study *Ecocriticism*. The first approach specified by Garrard is called “cornucopia” and its underlying tenet is the assumption that the environmental crisis and nearly all the associated ecological perils are illusory or at least overestimated. Despite extensive scientific evidence that humans are responsible for the current changes in the Earth ecosystem, especially the latest climate change and the acceleration in the rate of species die-outs, cornucopians maintain that the changes are natural and that the dynamism of economic and technological progress will eventually engender solutions to the environmental challenges. According to the cornucopian approach, intensified urbanization, industrialization, and the mechanization of everyday life may improve human welfare and provide enough assets to equalize the consequences of the

environmental degradation.

Wilfred Beckerman (b. 1925), a professor of Oxford University, argues that the issue of resource depletion is a dynamic one, therefore, when the contemporary resources are used, new ones will be found, as “many things become resources over time. Each century has seen new resources emerge.”²⁶ A recognized American professor of economics, Julian Simon (1931-1998), shares Beckerman's view of the sustainability of the industrial advancement. In *Scarcity or Abundance: A Debate on the Environment* (1994), he maintains that technological progress, even though mediated by an impoverishment in the natural environment, always improves the quality of human life, therefore, it should not be hindered by ecologists who, paradoxically, are also concerned about human welfare. He argues that the claims of ecologists should be rejected because they have frequently been wrong about their predictions. Moreover, Simon accuses ecologists of using inaccurate research techniques, such as faulty climate models, and also of exaggerating the scale of the environmental changes. In effect, Simon presents environmental and ecological activists as scaremongers.²⁷ Frederick Buell, a professor of English and Cultural Studies at the Columbia University of New York, in his 2003 study *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century* indicates that cornucopians have undermined the authority of the ecological movement by spreading its negative image in the media and popular culture. According to Buell, cornucopians have hindered several ecological endeavors, among others the initiative of limiting the emission of greenhouse gases, by misinforming the popular opinion about the benefits of introducing ecologically efficient legislation.²⁸

Due to its inconsistency with the ecological paradigm, the cornucopian approach

26 Wilfred Beckerman, *Small is Stupid: Blowing the Whistle on the Greens* (London: Duckworth, 1995), 60.

27 Julian Simon and Norman Meyers, *Scarcity or Abundance: A Debate on the Environment* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1994), 86.

28 Frederick Buell, *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 20, 30.

cannot be recognized as an environmental movement. However, cornucopian views are included in the ecological debate because of their significant influence on the popular image of ecologists. Cornucopians regard eco-minded action as redundant and exaggerated, ignoring the fact that a growing ecological awareness of numerous entrepreneurs, politicians, and citizens has notably contributed to establishing the present level of social prosperity. Their approach is then not only anthropocentric and speciesist, but also short-sighted and self-contradictory.

1.3. Shallow environmentalism

“Shallow environmentalism” is a term proposed in 1972 by a Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess (1912-2009), who used it to describe an approach which fights against pollution and abusive consumption of resources in order to ensure the comforts of people in the developed countries.²⁹ Shallow environmentalists are interested in the ozone hole, waste recycling, and the extinction of species but they would not risk a significant decline in their standard of living by becoming more involved in the struggle against environmental threats. Shallow environmentalists are relatively numerous, especially in the US, Germany, and Great Britain, therefore, they can exert significant influence on politicians and business, forcing them to adjust production to the environmentalist expectations and requirements. Although shallow environmentalists are frequently accused of succumbing to cornucopian pressures, their successes are evident, especially in modeling people's sensitivity to the environmental issues, among them animal rights and the emission of ozone-depleting gases. Among shallow environmentalists, there are a substantial group of active readers, potentially familiar with environmental literature, who

²⁹ See Arne Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World,” *Inquiry* 16 (1973): 95.

might constitute an interesting object for ecocritical studies.³⁰

1.4. Deep Ecology

As an alternative to shallow environmentalism, Naess introduced an environmental movement called “deep ecology,” formulating its tenets in a short 1973 article entitled “The Shallow and the Deep.” According to Naess, all living creatures are mutually interrelated, egalitarian, and of inherent value. The greatest worth is not in individual organisms but in whole multilevel ecosystems. Therefore, ecological activism should strive at enriching natural biodiversity and strengthening symbiotic connections between particular species. Man, as one of the species, ought to follow the rules of symbiotic co-existence with other beings, supporting the self-sustainability of all ecosystems. Deep ecology is frequently considered the most radical of all the analyzed approaches.³¹

In the nineteen-eighties, when deep ecology was becoming widely-known, Naess and George Sessions, philosopher at Sierra College in Rocklin, California, revised the main principles of deep ecology in order to provide a more tangible basis for the emerging social platform of the hitherto academic movement. They rejected the notion that beings are metaphysically interconnected with each other; they also replaced the idea of biocentric egalitarianism with the concept of the “intrinsic value” of nature, arguing that both human and nonhuman lives have value in themselves, and not because people have ascribed it to them. Moreover, according to deep ecologists, people are not atomistic individuals who can use nature for their own selfish purposes but, together with other beings, they form a closely connected community in which to harm an other living thing means harming oneself. For deep ecologists, mankind is dependent on nature, therefore,

30 Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 22-23; Martin Lewis, *Green Delusions: An Environmentalist Critiques of Radical Environmentalism* (London: Duke University Press, 1992).

31 Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep,” 95-100.

people should protect the environment in order to secure their own survival.³²

Deep ecologists explain the current environmental crisis as deriving from the dualism of man and nature, embedded in Western philosophy and reproduced by Western culture. In order to counteract the crisis, deep ecologists, among them Bill Devall (1938-2009) and George Sessions, urge to value nature-centered systems instead of the human-centered ones. Such a naturalistic egalitarianism negates most of the Western humanistic thought:

Deep ecology is concerned with encouraging an egalitarian attitude on the part of humans not only towards all *members* of the ecosphere, but even toward all identifiable *entities* or *forms* in the ecosphere. Thus, this attitude is intended to extend, for example, to such entities (or forms) as rivers, landscapes, and even spaces and social systems considered in their own right.³³

Not only does the above view lack any actual content, but it also justifies misanthropy. Admittedly, Devall and Sessions argue that the “flourishing of nonhuman life requires a smaller human population,”³⁴ advocating for clearly anti-human changes, such as a substantial reduction in the human population. Since it is difficult to imagine effective and socially acceptable measures to implement such postulates, deep ecologists still struggle to enforce their principles of interspecies egalitarianism and eco-egalitarian ethics.

Although deep ecology has managed to export the idea of intrinsic value beyond academia, it has proven substantially unrealistic about the scale and manageability of their postulates. Arguing for small societies living in harmony with wild nature, deep ecologists seem to have disregarded the fact that a majority of human population inhabit highly urbanized zones, and that areas of unspoiled nature will most probably cease to exist. Therefore, it is utopian to offer a massive return to nature, especially that along with the

32 Knut A. Jacobsen, “Bhagavadgita, Ecosophy T, and Deep Ecology,” in *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology*, ed. Eric Katz, Andrew Light and David Rothenberg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 231-252.

33 Bill Devall and George Sessions, *The Deep Ecology Movement* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995), 270 (emphasis original).

34 Ibid., 70.

growth of cities wilderness will more frequently penetrate into the urban space. The process is already visible: people grow their food in their home gardens, numerous animals inhabit municipal parks, and many birds nest under the roofs of skyscrapers. Clearly, deep ecology fails to acknowledge that people can both inhabit the city and coexist with nature.³⁵

1.5. Ecofeminism

While deep ecology recognizes the Western anthropocentric distinction between humanity and nature as the main source of the environmental crisis, ecofeminists claim that the cause of the current ecological threat derives mainly from the androcentric “logic of domination.”³⁶ A feminist approach to the environmental issues, known as ecofeminism, emerged in the US in the early nineteen-seventies. The ecofeminist approach is based on the assumption that the repressive social models which subjugate women to men are analogous to those of human superiority over nature. The most distinguished proponents of ecofeminism are Carolyn Merchant (b. 1936), a professor of environmental history, philosophy and ethics at the University of California, Berkeley, and Val Plumwood (1939-2008), an Australian ecofeminist activist and scholar. Both Merchant and Plumwood argue that the male prejudice against women and the abuse of natural resources originate in the Western dualism between reason and nature. Therefore, the feminist fight against patriarchy and any other oppressive dualistic systems of power are uniform with the struggle to protect the environment. According to ecofeminists, in order to successfully deal with the environmental crisis, it is necessary to first reform the Western ideology of domination, especially that of patriarchy, and then to eradicate all the dualisms that such

35 Freya Mathews, “Deep Ecology,” in Jamieson, *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 229-231.

36 Karen J. Warren, “Toward an Ecofeminist Peace Politics,” in *Ecological Feminism*, ed. Karen J. Warren and Barbara Wells-Howe (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 180.

an ideology conditions.³⁷

1.6. Social Ecology

Similarly to the ecofeminist stance, the approach of social ecologists implies that the environmental crisis results from the orders of men's domination by other men. Specifically, social ecologists claim that the economic “objectification of people as mere instruments of production foster[s] the objectification of nature as mere 'natural resources.'”³⁸ Accordingly, while recognizing the dualism between man and nature, social ecologists stress that environmental problems cannot be separated from social matters, such as employment, housing, poverty, and shortage of clean water. Therefore, by fighting social and economic inequalities, eco-social activists strive to subdue the causes of the environmental crisis.

Social ecologists relate processes in market economy to the reasons for the environmental crisis. However, due to their sociological approach to ecological issues, they are frequently accused of anthropocentrism; the accusations are mainly leveled by deep ecologists. Social ecologists also face ecofeminists' accusations of ignoring the patriarchal origins of the present ecological predicament. Social ecologists usually decline these accusations by claiming that both deep ecology and ecofeminism either retreat into essentialism or approach nearly meaningless pan-species egalitarianism and mysticism that promote only passivity. Social ecologists also underline the importance of rational reflection, questioned by feminists and deep ecologists, and recognize reason as the key factor leading to an effective political engagement. Without rational thinking, it would not

37 Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (1980; New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 168; Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 47-55; cf. Victoria Davion, “Ecofeminism,” in Jamieson, *Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 233-234.

38 Murray Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*, 4th ed. (1982; Edinburgh: AK Press, 2005), 240.

be possible to implement all the changes necessary to counteract the environmental crisis. For social ecologists, emotion, mysticism, essentialism, and romanticism are hardly effective means to effectively counteracting the environmental crisis.³⁹

1.7. Postcolonial Eco-Theories

Similarly to ecofeminism and social ecology, eco-conscious postcolonial theoreticians claim that the causes of the environmental crisis derive from economically motivated systems of domination and abuse in which some men are justified to exploit less privileged people. According to the postcolonial eco-theory, the main motivation behind colonialism was not only to conquer indigenous peoples and their land, but also to gain access to the overseas reserves of natural resources, such as game, ores, wood, farmland, and even landscape. Therefore, in order to justify the Western exploitation of the colonized lands, the nature of the New World was frequently pictured as requiring Western managerialism. Admittedly, not only were the colonized presented as requiring the colonizer's assistance, but such a demeaning projection was also applied to the nature of the conquered lands. As argued by postcolonial eco-theoreticians, the vision of the colonized nature was transmitted by literature and painting intended mainly for large Western audiences. The task of ecocriticism is to investigate how colonizers propagated their visions of nature through literature, what stylistic devices and imagery they used, and how successful those strategies were.⁴⁰

Postcolonial ecocriticism investigates the manner in which literature popularizes various forms of present-day neocolonialism. Western environmentalism often involves

³⁹ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 33.

⁴⁰ See Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Gerooge B. Handley, "Introduction: Towards an Aesthetics of the Earth," in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Gerooge B. Handley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-35.

former colonies in the system of global managerialism by forcing them to introduce environmental reforms in exchange for reducing their debts or alleviating immigration laws. The usual effect of the reforms, frequently under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, is the liberalization of the economy of postcolonial states, and the capitalist penetration into their markets. On the one hand, postcolonial countries establish national parks, build green-energy power plants, and introduce recycle schemes; on the other hand, the governments of such countries are forced to pay the West for its know-how and technical support to realize the goals. In this regard, Western environmental managerialism may appear as another form of colonization. The task of postcolonial ecocriticism is to investigate how literature assists or counteracts the capitalist modes of ecologically-motivated neocolonialism.⁴¹

1.8. Heideggerian Eco-Philosophy

Unlike the ecofeminist and eco-social approaches, Martin Heidegger perceives the man-nature duality not solely as a factor alienating people from the natural environment, but also as a “clearing” space in which humans and other creatures “disclose” themselves as actual beings. The most immediate space of the “clearing” to humans is their consciousness. By “disclosing” Heidegger meant the process of realizing that one exists as a phenomenon of another's consciousness. The process of “disclosing” is mutually beneficial for both man and the “disclosed” entities. On the one hand, by entering human consciousness, non-human entities “disclose” themselves to humans and to the external world. On the other hand, once the disclosure is accomplished, humans can define their world by determining its qualities in relation to the entities that fill their consciousness.

41 William Slaymaker, “Echoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses,” *PLMA* 116, no. 1 (2001): 132; Mark Dowie, “Conservation Refugees,” in *The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2006*, ed. Brian Greene (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 68.

Heideggerian eco-theoreticians argue that people “disclose” themselves to the world in the presence of nature, therefore, nature is necessary for humans to exist not only in the bodily but also in the phenomenological sense.⁴²

According to Heidegger, the mode that best allows for such disclosures is poetry because poetic language, due to its mystifying and implied meanings, allows for the disclosed entity to appear in its most proper form. People learn through poetry that each living thing has its distinctive Being, independent of human interpretation. It can be claimed that poetry reveals, “discloses,” the other creatures' Beings to human consciousness. In Heidegger's view, man “is not the lord of the beings. Man is the shepherd of Being.”⁴³ Common talk, devoid of the poetic element, uses disposable words that can only designate a world of disposable matter, instrumental to human needs, not accessed as unique and valuable in itself. For Heidegger, everyday speech conceals, rather than “discloses” the Being of things; Being can only be revealed to humans through poetry.⁴⁴

Due to the central role assigned by Heidegger to poetry and poeticized language, the Heideggerian eco-philosophy offers a wide range of interpretative and critical possibilities for the ecocritical study of literature. Despite its clear anthropocentrism and evident anti-rationalism, Heidegger's theory attributes humans and animals with equal status. Although dependent of each other, neither humans nor animals are superior to one another. Similarly to the former approaches, the Heideggerian thought introduces a dualism between man and nature; however, instead of alienating and separating, it makes them complement each other. Language and especially poetry are the modes of the above reciprocity. The task of ecocriticism is to investigate how literature enhances the quality and effectiveness of the

42 Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” trans. David Farrell Krell, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (1935; New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 170-179.

43 Ibid., 245.

44 Ibid.

man-nature phenomenological symbiosis.

1.9. The Culture-Nature Dichotomy

The affinity between culture and nature has been reconsidered by two contemporary scholars: Timothy Morton (b. 1986), a professor of English at Rice University, Texas, and Terry Eagleton (b. 1943), a professor of English literature at Lancaster University. According to Morton, “nature” is not a neutral term but a man-made concept which denotes a strictly human vision of the natural world. In Morton's view, all the theoretical and social discourses which designate nature as their fundamental point of reference, among them ecology, conservation, and ecocriticism itself, are founded on a faulty or even entirely artificial basis. However, despite such a strong claim, Morton does not encourage to reject ecology for its alleged faultiness. Rather, he argues that ecologists and people involved in the ecologist discourses ought to re-examine the concept of nature to use it in a more precise way. Significantly, in order to effectively counteract the environmental crisis, “nature” should not be confused with the actual natural environment.⁴⁵

Eagleton claims that the postmodernist tendency of treating nature as a socio-cultural construct is “no more than an insidious naturalization of culture [or] simply the cultural frozen.”⁴⁶ In *The Idea of Culture* (2000) he names the tendency “culturalism” and immediately rejects it as limiting and relativist. According to Eagleton, culture and nature permeate each other in the sense that culture stems from nature and nature is a pre-conceived cultural concept. Contrary to numerous postmodern theorists, Eagleton rejects the notion of nature as a mere conceptual opposite (“the Other”) of culture. Instead, he perceives nature as “a kind of inert weight within it [culture], opening up an inner fracture

45 Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5, 11.

46 Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 93.

which runs all the way through the human subject.”⁴⁷ In Eagleton's view, culture and nature define one another because on the conceptual level they function as an antithesis to each other. Each of them determines the other's meaning as well as socio-cultural perception by specifying what the other is not. Eagleton claims that a mutually beneficial antagonism is particularly visible in the way Western people depict nature in art and literature. In the Western paradigm, nature has usually been associated with chaos and cruelty, therefore, the West defines culture as an organized and peaceful way of co-existence among people. Similar mechanism appears in the cultures of some American Indians. They believe that nature can supply all that people need to survive, therefore, there is hardly any concept of a surplus production in their languages. According to Eagleton, then, both nature and culture are constructs predetermined by natural circumstances, yet defined in cultural discourse.

The cultural theories of Morton and Eagleton have propelled deeper investigations into the approaches of culture, art, and literature to nature. The theories have also started the development of more advanced environmentally-oriented cultural revisionism, providing a scholarly background for environmentally-oriented literary criticism. Although internally diverse and sometimes at odds with the environmental conservationist movement, the resulting eco-minded literary studies have concentrated on identifying and analyzing the most frequent metaphors through which Western culture conceptualizes nature, the environment, and the emerging crisis of ecological sustainability.

1.10. The Metaphors of Nature Writing

Ecocriticism investigates literature as a cultural means of presenting, understanding, and

⁴⁷ Ibid., 110.

developing arguments related to contemporary environmental concerns. In one of his most important works on literary criticism, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1996), Terry Eagleton argues that politicized critical discourses, such as feminism, Marxism, and ecocriticism, do not investigate the actual content of the analyzed works, but they rather concentrate on the stylistic devices used to present the literary content. Eagleton refers to such an approach to literature as “rhetoric”:

[...] reading a zoology textbook to find out about giraffes is a part of studying zoology, but reading it to see how its discourse is structured and organized, and examining what kind of effects these forms and devices produce in particular readers in actual situations is a different kind of project. It is, in fact, probably the oldest form of literary criticism in the world, known as rhetoric.⁴⁸

Accordingly, ecocriticism should approach literature as a set of metaphors, literary devices, ways of constructing and deconstructing nature as a projection of common imagination. The most significant environmental metaphors are pollution, the pastoral, apocalypse, dwelling, and animals. Although not exhaustive, the ensuing presentation of the metaphors is meant to be enabling, rather than constraining.

1.10.1. Pollution

The word “pollution” comes from the Latin verb *polluere* which means “to defile.” Before the modern era, it had referred solely to moral corruption. At the turn of the seventeenth century, when science was acquiring its modern character, the subjective meaning of pollution changed into an objective one, designating a neutral fact informing that a certain area contains substances detrimental to its natural *homeostasis*. However, pollution has also come to function as a pejorative socio-cultural construct, present on various levels of representation from literature through popular culture to economy and science. Lawrence

48 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), 205.

Buell (b. 1939), a professor of American literature at Harvard University, has referred to the widespread propagation of the pollution imagery as a “toxic discourse.” Buell enumerates four tropes characteristic of texts including the pollution imagery: “mythology of betrayed Edens,” characterized by a nostalgia after the loss of once unpolluted environment; “images of a world without refuge from toxic penetration”; oppression by totalizing organizations; and “gothicization” of the world in which nature has been entirely polluted. In Buell's view, the popular imagery associated with pollution is frequently used in mass media to manipulate people about the extent of the environmental crisis.⁴⁹

Ulrich Beck (b. 1944), a German sociologist and philosopher from the London School of Economics, agrees with Buell by claiming that pollution has become a widespread pop-cultural “spectacle” detached from its actual referent. Therefore, argues Beck, people do not know what toxic or nuclear pollution is because their understanding is shaped by their pop-cultural representations, among others Don DeLillo's 1986 novel *White Noise* or Steven Seagal's 1994 film *On Deadly Ground*. According to Beck, the popular ignorance regarding pollution creates room for misunderstanding and manipulation; the disinformation also sends to people false signals about the consequences of pollution, diverting people's attention from their actual extent. It is in this sense that cornucopians often use literature and film to show androgenic pollution as quickly reparable within human means. However, Beck stresses that there are also positive effects of a growing presence of the pollution metaphor in popular culture. In Beck's view, media and art can make people see types of pollution they have not recognized. Noise and light pollution are the most immediate examples.⁵⁰

Ecocriticism deconstructs the pop-cultural perception of what pollution is in order to differentiate between actual facts and a pre-conceived fact representation. Due to the

49 Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U. S. and Beyond* (London: Belknap Press, 2001), 37-41.

50 Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), 158.

differentiation, people can recognize and prevent real dangers more efficiently. In this regard, the focus of the ecocritical analysis is not only on literature but also on other genres of art, science, mass media, and the political discourse.

1.10.2. The Pastoral

The earliest literary genre characterized by an intended distortion of the relation between facts and a representation of facts is the pastoral type of writing. It originated in Antiquity with the Alexandrian poet Theocritus (c. 316-260) who in his *Idylls* (3rd century BC) began the tradition of writing that depicted idealized visions of country life, praising rural life in harmony with nature. In his work, Theocritus associated the country with peace and spiritual wealth, whereas he described the town as the place of squalor and moral decline. Theocritus differentiated between the present, depicted as corrupted, and the past, rendered as blissful and almost paradisaal. The spacial and temporal distinctions introduced by Theocritus have determined Western pastoral writing throughout Antiquity, Romanticism, and the modern times.

While Theocritus focused mainly on man's harmonious co-existence with nature, Virgil (70-19 BC), a Roman poet, the author of the *Eclogues* (ca. 37 BC) and the *Georgics* (ca. 29 BC), was first to concentrate on the natural setting, rather than on people and their artifacts. Virgil placed emphasis on specific environmental problems, among them deforestation, connected with the advancement of the Roman civilization. In his works, Virgil located the feelings of his characters in natural entities, including animals and landscape. That stylistic technique, known as "pathetic fallacy," soon became one of the most popular literary tropes of pastoral writing.⁵¹

51 See J. D. Hughes, *Pan's Travail: Environmental Problems of the Ancient Greeks and Romans* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); John Ruskin, "Of the Pathetic Fallacy," in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin: Modern Painters*, 3rd vol. (1856; New York and Chicago: National Library

From the ecocritical point of view, Virgil is among the key pastoral writers because he significantly contributed to the Western idealization of rural areas. He also laid grounds for the subsequent demonization of such ecosystems as marshlands, fens, and swamps. According to Rob Giblett, an Australian environmental researcher, the pejorative imagery connected with wetlands, frequently reproduced in art, generated the impetus to drain them almost as a matter of course. Admittedly, apart from Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), an acclaimed Irish poet and playwright, literary authors have rarely appreciated the beauty of wet areas.⁵²

Raymond Williams (1921-1988), a Welsh scholar, novelist and critic, claims that apart from idealizing the rural, Theocritus, Virgil, and the following pastoral writers depicted the country as separated from the natural processes of labor. They disregarded natural growth and decay. They also neglected natural beings as independent entities. Williams accuses pastoral authors, among them English romantic poets Thomas Carew (1596-1640) and William Wordsworth (1770-1850), of propagating naïve cornucopian visions in which country people's hard and often unrewarding labor are frequently mystified as easy and blissful. In William's view, the romantic vision of idyllic countryside not only falsified the common view of the country but it also denied the suffering of animals raised and culled for food. A British historian, Keith Thomas (b. 1933), argues that the cornucopian imagery of romantic poets resulted from a growing dissatisfaction with the urbanization caused by the Industrial Revolution. According to Thomas, the development of urban areas caused a nostalgia among townsmen for the countryside and unspoiled nature.⁵³

Although pastoral literature is frequently accused of cornucopian simplification and kitsch, for Heideggerian ecocritics the spontaneity and naïvety of some pastoral poets,

Association, 2012) chap. 12, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/38923/38923-h/38923-h.htm>.

52 Rodney James Giblett, *Postmodern Wetlands: Culture, History, Ecology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 3-5.

53 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (1973; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 12-18; Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 301.

among them John Clare (1793-1864), functions as a “clearing” (*Lichtung*) providing space for the Being of natural entities. Accordingly, ecocriticism approaches the pastoral metaphor from two perspectives. For a number of ecocritics, the pastoral mystifies the image of the rural. For another, the pastoral preoccupation with nature is an attempt at understanding and appreciating the natural world.⁵⁴

1.10.3. Wilderness

Since Antiquity, European pastoral writing has been praising rural, tamed and peaceful landscapes, whereas the wild has been portrayed as dangerous, fearful and unwelcome. The earliest known Western literary work, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca. 2100 BC), presents wilderness as a menace where the hero's first antagonist is the forest. Similarly, *The Bible* depicts desert as a place of exile, hardship, and evil. Although sometimes approached as an ideal setting for spiritual repose and redemption, especially in the hermitic practice, throughout the premodern era, wilderness was most often delineated as threatening and unfriendly to people. With the advent of the Scientific Revolution, nature was viewed as a complex system of mechanistic interdependencies, mainly due to the Cartesian concept of the world as a well-ordained automaton. According to Heideggerian eco-theoreticians, the vision of the world offered by Descartes depicted living creatures and other natural objects as tools at human disposal, preventing them from “disclosing” themselves in their full and complete Being. The early modern anti-nature rationalism is then questioned by Heideggerian ecocritics for diminishing nature to a mere utility.⁵⁵

The mechanistic vision of nature was re-evaluated in Romanticism, mainly owing to

54 Cf. Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2.

55 Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 12-14; cf. René Descartes, “Discourse on the Method,” trans. Robert Stoothoff, in vol. 1 of *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 111-151.

the Burkean idea of the sublime. According to Edmund Burke (1729-1797), an Irish political theorist and philosopher, the beautiful evokes pleasure, whereas natural phenomena, among them great chasms, erupting volcanoes, darkness, fire, and storm clouds cause the feeling of the sublime. In Burke's view, the sublime is associated with the feeling of an overwhelming passion and "Astonishment," that is, "that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of Horror."⁵⁶ Therefore, the sublime is a mixture of awe induced by some overpowering phenomena and the certainty that the phenomena cannot seriously menace one's life when they are observed. Accordingly, a bulk of wilderness literature aims at evoking the feeling of sublimity in order to present nature's strength and independence from human control.

Although sublime wilderness had numerous literary representations in Romantic poetry, for instance in the descriptions of the Scottish Highlands, the Alps, or the German Schwarzwald, it was predominantly the New World's writing where sublime depictions of nature were particularly frequent. The settler experience at the regressing American frontier abounded in unseen sights, most of which could have evoked Burkean "Astonishment" and "Horror." Unlike in Europe, the nature of America and Australia was pristine and unaffected by civilization. It revealed itself to the pioneer in its grandest might and beauty. Affected by the landscapes of the New World, American, Canadian and Australian writers, educated in the literary tradition of the European pastoral, developed their own wilderness type of pastoral writing. While the pastoral of Europe emphasized tamed environments, the wilderness writing of the New World stressed the power of natural forces; it focused on nature's indifference to human issues and its perpetuity. However, most of the New World's wilderness authors described either colonial aggression against the land or masculine agrarianism and retreat into the wilderness.

⁵⁶ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (1757; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 53.

Significantly, in Thoreau's *Walden*, the pivotal work of American pastoral writing, there are hardly any women present.

Annette Kolodny (b. 1941), the author of the first important psycho-historical study of femininity in American pastoral, *The Lay of the Land* (1975), argues that the virile community of the American frontier legitimized colonization by picturing the conquered land as female, thus as subduable and in need of male management. Apart from the patriarchal aspect, the wilderness literature of America had a racial dimension. According to Kolodny, a number of early North American wilderness authors treated Native Americans as elements of the described landscape. Therefore, similarly to the combated land, the indigenous peoples of America were pictured as natural entities that waited to be conquered by white settlers. Kolodny claims that black people were not directly referred to in the wilderness discourse, but they suffered denigration from being reduced to a mere component of the Southern plantation landscape, reproduced in the Southern pastoral writing.⁵⁷

Wilderness literature is frequently criticized for replicating the paradox of placing a human subject in an ideal wilderness space which is pure and immaculate precisely because of human absence. Moreover, not only does the wilderness discourse mystify the reality, but it also invalidates the effort to counteract the anthropogenic degradation of wilderness for it depicts human intervention as detrimental to wild areas. Eventually, it must not be forgotten that wilderness is a cultural construct, therefore, the concept of unspoiled and wild nature could be perceived as a self-contradiction.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as History and Experience in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 6; Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 54-63.

⁵⁸ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 81.

1.10.4. Apocalypse

Lawrence Buell claims that apocalypse “is the single most powerful master metaphor that contemporary environment imagination has at its disposal.”⁵⁹ According to Buell, the reason for the present popularity of the trope is because apocalypticism thrives at the times of crisis, and the current period of the environmental emergency can serve as an example. In a sense, the apocalyptic trope constitutes a means of acknowledging and resisting the fear evoked by the crisis. However, the problem with apocalyptic narratives is that they frequently exaggerate the danger and spread undue panic, instead of informing and sensitizing. Damian Thompson (b. 1962), a British journalist, in his study *The End of Time* (1996) argues that those exaggerations, often legitimized through *licentia poetica*, originate from the regulative role of the apocalyptic narratives in respect to society. He writes that apocalypticism is “designed to stiffen the resolve of an embattled community by dangling in front of it the vision of a sudden and permanent release from its captivity.”⁶⁰ In Thompson's argument, apocalypticism could be perceived as a cultural means of preparing people for the approaching end. In this sense, apocalyptic literature can also be approached as a means of forestalling the threats posed by the environmental crisis.

The other aspect of apocalyptic narratives is that they supply mass media with an abundant catastrophic imagery, leading to a marked social preference for exaggerated interpretations of relatively insignificant or isolated occurrences. Familiarized with catastrophic content, the reader becomes less responsive to the apocalyptic imagery. Therefore, in order to retain a relatively high level of public attention, media services tend to dramatize their reports on the most violent natural occurrences. It is particularly visible

59 Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture* (London: Princeton University Press, 1995), 285.

60 Damian Thompson, *The End of Time: Faith and the Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium* (London: Minerva, 1996), 14.

in media coverages concerning natural disasters, such as floods, tornadoes or heatwaves. Such “environmental doom merchanting,”⁶¹ rarely grounded in any approved scientific research, provokes a search for culprits. While scientists cannot indicate any definite cause of the environmental crisis, deep ecologists blame humanity and civilization, ecofeminists – androcentric culture, social eco-philosophers – class inequalities, and cornucopians point to the environmental discourse as an instance of manipulation by ecological lobby.⁶²

As regards the apocalyptic metaphor, the task of ecocriticism is to differentiate between the narratives that induce panic and the narratives that aim at warning people against real environmental threats. The task is challenging because authors referring to apocalypticism often confuse in their works honest information with scaremongering.

1.10.5. Dwelling

The pastoral, wilderness, and apocalypse tropes approach nature from an external perspective. They imply a human factor that either visits or imagines nature without ever actually uniting with it. However, there are narratives, mainly American ones, which depict varied attempts at coming to dwell in close symbiosis with the surrounding environment. Garrard refers to such narratives as “dwelling narratives.” In his view, “‘Dwelling’ is not a transient state; rather, it implies the long-term implication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry, and death, of ritual, life and work.”⁶³ Therefore, the dwelling metaphor indicates an insider's perspective, one of a farmer or of a peasant, but also one of somebody who cares for his or her environment, who treats it as home, and who feels obliged to it by virtue of its capacity to sustain life.

61 Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 115.

62 Richard D. North, *Life on a Modern Planet: A Manifesto for Progress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 99-100. See Frederick Buell, *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century*, 302.

63 Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 117.

The dwelling trope first occurred in *Genesis* in which God let people have dominion over the Earth and benefit from all the creatures inhabiting it. Although some ecocritical thinkers, among them Lynn White Jr. (1907-1987), an American professor of medieval history from University of California, argue that the Biblical account licenses human exploitation of nature, there are numerous ecocritics, including John Passmore and Jeanne Kay, a University of Utah scholar, who claimed that the Biblical use of the dwelling trope implicated “stewardship” or respectful “usufruct” of the land, rather than selfish despotism. God gave the Earth to man to use it well and with respect to all of His creatures.⁶⁴

The first secular application of the trope can be found in Virgil's *Georgics*. The work deals with agricultural productivity with an emphasis on the ritual observance of natural phenomena and fertilization of the soil; it also promotes careful husbandry and social values that enhance the quality of country life. The farmer of *Georgics*, attached to the land, honest in labor, and devoted to the work, is presented as an ideal citizen of the Roman Empire. Admittedly, apart from mystifying the rural life, Virgil also politicized it. A similar politicization of the dwelling narrative can be observed in the American eighteenth-century agrarian ideology. In his 1781 *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), the third president of the USA, romanticized land by arguing that Americans should base their economy on agriculture, rather than manufacturing. In his conservative agrarianism, he maintained that citizenry composed of farmers, including slave owners, would form the ideal American society, which would function as a paragon for the whole nation.⁶⁵ Jefferson's marketization of the farm was criticized by Thoreau in his *Walden*. Describing “The Bean-Farm” experiment, Thoreau condemned farming that

64 Lynn White Jr., “Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” in Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, 9-14; Jeanne Kay, “Concepts of Nature in the Hebrew Bible,” *Environmental Ethics* 10, no. 4 (1988): 315-320.

65 See Thomas Jefferson, “Manufacturers,” in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. Frank Shuffelton (1785; New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 170-171.

sought only financial income. He openly questioned Jefferson's praise of the rural virtues of industry, thrift and self-interest:

By avarice and selfishness, and a grovelling habit, from which none of us is free, of regarding the soil as property [...] the landscape is deformed, husbandry is degraded with us, and farmer leads the meanest of lives. He knows Nature but as a robber.⁶⁶

Contrary to Jefferson, Thoreau maintained that the farmer, wrongly idealized as a lover of nature, was often a servant to rural capitalism, concentrated on his own benefit, and rarely interested in balanced and nature-conscious husbandry.⁶⁷

Politicization of the rural and, especially, of the resulting ideal of one's embedment in the land is discernible in Martin Heidegger's essentialist philosophy. In his search for pure, unspoiled and authentic mode of Being, Heidegger celebrated farming as the simplest and the most "disclosing" way of life. He drew attention to the people who inhabit the country. In Heidegger's philosophy, countrymen were an integral part of nature treating it as an organic whole composed of independent entities, and not as a mere reserve of disposable tools and freely-available resources. Despite their pre-technological and usually unsophisticated worldview, country folk had access to the true "thingness of things,"⁶⁸ that is, they had access to the things' Being. Heidegger praised countrymen's rudimentary language for its closeness to the primeval referents. He believed country people to be more familiar with the meanings of the speech they used. In the Heideggerian paradigm, dwelling functions as a metaphor for a place of co-existence between people and the surrounding environment.⁶⁹

The most characteristic themes associated with the dwelling trope are: man's stewardship of nature, sustainable agriculture, a critique of market economy and

⁶⁶ Thoreau, *Walden*, 131.

⁶⁷ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 119.

⁶⁸ Heidegger, "On the Origin of Work of Art," 159.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 159-160.

capitalism, and the interrelations between the city and the country. A separate sub-genre of the dwelling literature are Indian dwelling narratives. The most recognized Indian dwelling authors are Leslie Marmon Silko (b. 1948), native of the Laguna Pueblo tribe, and Louise Erdrich (b. 1954), an American novelist. Although dwelling literature frequently popularizes Indian culture and extends knowledge about Indian life, it is frequently criticized, mainly by Indians themselves, for reinforcing the Western distorted vision of Native Americans. Indian dwelling authors estrange and mystify their cultures by picturing Indian people as nature lovers, ecological and naturally embedded in the land. Indian dwelling literature often misrepresents Native Americans as a homogeneous group.⁷⁰

The trope of dwelling seems to be one of the most pertinent for the ecocritical analysis of literature because it comprises a varied imagery, extensive influences of other genres, and strong political connotations. Together with the apocalypse trope, the metaphor of dwelling occupies substantial space in mass media and popular culture.

1.10.6. Animals

The term “rhetoric of animality” was first used by Steve Barker, a scholar at the University of Central Lancashire, to refer to the literary modes of describing animals, but it was most probably inspired by Peter Singer who in his *Animal Liberation* (1975) criticized the Cartesian argument of understanding animal pain as a mere mechanical response to external stimuli. Descartes based his anthropocentric view on the assumption that animals were mere automata, devoid of soul and reason, whose distressing pain reactions at vivisection, or similar forms of maltreatment were equivalent to alarms produced by machines. Singer undermined Descartes's limiting vision of the moral status of animals by

⁷⁰ Thomas King, introduction to *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Native Canadian Fiction*, ed. Thomas King (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), ix-xvii.

referring to Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), a British jurist, philosopher, and a social reformer. Bentham opposed Descartes's anthropocentric ethics by arguing that it was not reason but the ability to feel pain which rendered a being as morally important. It was not until the second half of the twentieth century and Singer's activism that Bentham's ideas were rediscovered and given proper attention.⁷¹

Although the discourse commenced by Singer challenged the mechanistic view of animals, the rhetoric of animality was still based on the dichotomy between the human and the animal. Jacques Derrida saw this dichotomy as fundamental to the ontological status of a human being. In his 1997 address “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),”⁷² Derrida argued that people project themselves as superior to animals by subsuming all living creatures, regardless of their intra-species differences and individual characteristics, under the generic notion of “the animal.” According to Derrida, whenever someone says “dog,” “pig” or “cat,” not only a representative of a specific species is indicated, but also human superiority to the indicated being is meant. Accordingly, the linguistic denotation of animals, implying a mode of human superiority, is projected and implemented in the actual relations between humans and real-life animals. Therefore, the symbolic language, which is beyond animals, determines them as inferior and results in their subjugation to humans. Derrida refers to the subduing function of language as *l'animot*, combining in one term the sound of the French equivalent for animals (*animaux*) and for a word (*mot*). According to Derrida, to say “animal” is equivalent to saying “inferior,” but animals as actual living creatures are hardly the linguistically-designated “animals,” therefore, they cannot be evaluated as inferior to man because they function beyond the subjective frame of human language. However, Derrida claims that the

71 Steve Barker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 4.

72 The French title of the address is “*L'animal que donc je suis (à suivre)*” and it is a play on the shared first person singular present form of *être* (to be) and *suivre* (to follow) – *je suis* – used to suggest a displacement of the Cartesian priority of man, as a thinking animal, over other animals.

paradigm of animal inferiority is deeply embedded in culture, therefore, animals are most often treated in the manner implicated by language, that is, as “animals” subservient to man.⁷³

For Derrida, the encounter of man and animal is both alienating and defining. Man and animal cannot be subsumed under one conceptual term, so they remain separate; one and the other gain their distinctive identities and meanings. Donna Haraway (b. 1944), an American science studies scholar from the University of California, Santa Cruz, follows Derrida's reasoning yet she questions his duality of men and nature. In her 2008 study *When Species Meet*, she argues that “those who are to be in the world are constituted in intra- and interaction. The partners do not precede the meaning; species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject- and object-shaping dance of encounters.”⁷⁴ People and animals define each other through their mutual interaction. Haraway agrees with Derrida that the popular imagery of animality, conveyed by means of anthropocentric language, disturbs the interdependency between man and animals. However, she tries to mitigate the alienating vision of animals by introducing more inclusive and egalitarian terms. Accordingly, she introduces the term “critters,” by which she means “mechanistic, human, and animal beings whose historically situated infoldings are the flesh of contemporary naturecultures.”⁷⁵ By reducing the polarity between man and other creatures, she conforms to Derrida's claim that the man-animal dualism is purely ideological. Derrida's man-animal divergence, implicated in *l'animot*, and Haraway's man-animal convergence, implied in the term “natureculture,” are relatively recent metaphors of animal writing.

The two most common metaphors of animality are zoomorphism and

73 Jacques Derrida, “The Animals That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 396-418.

74 Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (2007; Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4.

75 Ibid., 261.

anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism seems the most frequent in literature. It occurs whenever human emotions, attitudes, and thoughts are projected on animals. If used uncritically, anthropomorphism makes it impossible to describe animal behavior in neutral and anthropocentrically unbiased terms. Frequently, by employing human language and concepts to describe animal behavior, anthropomorphism tends to oversimplify the animal world. Anthropomorphic animal narratives are thus disparaged with naïve and superficial renditions of animals in the style of Disney cartoon characters. The procedure is sometimes called “disnification.” The visual component of disnification is called “neotony,” which is an array of features commonly attributed with children or infant animals. The examples of neotony include big eyes, oversized head, short limbs, and rounded shape. Disney's Bambi, or the panda in the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) logo are examples of neotony.⁷⁶

Zoomorphism is less frequent in literature and it usually occurs as derivative from anthropomorphism. The most extreme examples of zoomorphism are racist comparisons to animals: Jews to rats or Africans to apes. These associations originate in prior anthropocentric projections of condemned human traits onto animals. To describe somebody's intelligence by comparing him/her to an owl is a secondary gesture to the previous act of making owls symbols of wisdom. A number of ecocritical theoreticians recognize sociobiology as a type of zoomorphism. The term “sociobiology” was introduced by an American biologist Edward Osborne Wilson (b. 1929) in his 1975 work entitled *Sociobiology*. Wilson defines sociobiology as the “systematic study of the biological basis of all social behavior.”⁷⁷ According to Garrard, Wilson's understanding of the development of societies in terms of Darwin's natural selection reduces the origin of human social attributes, such as language, morality, sense of aesthetics, or altruism, to a

⁷⁶ Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, 174.

⁷⁷ Edward Osborne Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975; Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 4.

simplified biological determinism, modulated by natural circumstances. Paradoxically, if the sociological view were correct, it would mean that the most frequently anthropomorphized species is man.⁷⁸

Inspired by Wilson's ideas, Margaret Atwood (b. 1939), a Canadian novelist and literary critic, in her 2003 novel *Orynx and Crake* presents a future world inhabited by humans whose needs have been reduced to food, sex, and commodity. By means of her zoomorphic distopia, Atwood depicts a post-apocalyptic future which has retained only vestiges of human civilization. She describes a human species that is de-anthropomorphized and interested solely in sustaining their crudest needs. Moreover, her gothicized vision of mankind bears resemblance to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). In Swift's satire, when the main protagonist leaves the savage Yahoos, crudely zoomorphized humans, and returns home, he cannot stop thinking about his family, friends and other civilized people in terms of Yahoo-like beasts whose animalistic instincts are temporarily suppressed by culture. Through zoomorphism, the two novels testify to the biological as well as to ontological closeness of man and animals.⁷⁹

Accordingly, zoomorphism and, to a lesser extent, anthropomorphism undermine Derrida's idea of *l'animot*, confirming Haraway's theory of "naturecultures." Unlike in mechanomorphism, which evokes estrangement by employing mechanistic descriptions of natural vitality, the language of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism defines, respectively, animals in terms of the human, and humans in terms of the animal. However, it is allomorphism that features a more subtle and conscious use of language. While the mechanomorphic idiom emphasizes strangeness of animals, the allomorphic imagery conveys their wondrous unfamiliarity, their baffling unapproachability in human terms, and their intriguing otherness. Therefore, the allomorphic trope consists of sounds,

⁷⁸ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 161.

⁷⁹ Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 77.

syntactic, and lexical variety. It is visual, also in its written form, and rarely understandable on the level of standard reading. Allomorphy involves word formation and transgressing grammatical rules. Consequently, allomorphic literature often approaches the Heideggerian ideal of language through which beings can “disclose” themselves as they actually are disclosed in their Being. Allomorphy is an idiom that expresses animal peculiarity by being itself linguistically peculiar. Moreover, by drawing upon unusual metaphors, the authors who use the allomorphic mode of writing render the unfamiliarity of *l'animot* particularly immediate in their works. A representative example of allomorphic literature can be *Translations from the Natural World*, a 1992 collection of poems by an Australian poet and a literary critic, Les Murray (b. 1938). Each work in the collection assumes a subject position of some non-human entity showing the variety and strangeness of the entity's perspectives. The titles of the poems, such as “Stone Fruit,” “Shellback Tick,” “Cell DNA,” and “The Snake's Heat Organ,” indicate their unconventionality. A poem entitled “Migratory,” with its lines shifted to the right edge of the page, evokes the idea of migrating birds' desire for movement. The poem called “Two Dogs” focuses on smells. “Shoal” evokes a sense of oneness among fish swimming “eye to eye.”⁸⁰

In the context of the literary descriptions of animals, the task of ecocriticism is, in a Heideggerian sense, to investigate the “disclosing” or “en-framing” quality of the tropes of animality. In a way, ecocriticism undermines Derrida's idea of *l'animot* as it suspends the alienating distance between man and animals. Since *l'animot* stands for the semiotic quality of language, ecocriticism must question human speech, linguistic conceptualizations, and the reliability of knowledge based on logocentric notions. Therefore, although Heideggerian in nature, ecocritical enquiry of animality goes beyond Heidegger. Not only do ecocritics search for a language that “discloses” Being, but they

80 Les Murray, *Translations from the Natural World* (Paddington: Isabella Press, 1992).

also look for a way of expression which would “disclose” the language itself. Ecocriticism investigates the functioning of language by unveiling its influence on the nonhuman part of creation. Furthermore, examining such works as Murray's *Translations from the Natural World*, ecocriticism, contrary to Heidegger's claim, reveals the failure of language, visible especially in the inability of language to “disclose” the animal mode of being. In this regard, ecocriticism confirms the idea of animal linguistic estrangement encapsulated in *l'animot*. Yet by exposing the ineptitude of human language ecocriticism also transposes the rhetoric of animality beyond *l'animot*. Therefore, the goal of ecocriticism is twofold: to “disclose” the alienation between man and animals and to authenticate the alienation by making it more familiar. Paradoxically, ecocriticism familiarizes the animal by acknowledging its unfamiliarity.

Conclusion

Ecocriticism, as an ethical and political mode of analysis, investigates various literary tropes, among which there are pollution, the pastoral, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, and animals, by adopting one of the following positions: shallow environmentalism, feminism, postcolonial studies, deep ecology, social studies, and Heideggerian philosophy. While its main focus is literature, ecocriticism also investigates culture understood as the composite of human activity. Ecocriticism investigates the mass media imagery connected with the depletion of the ozone layer; it studies the modes of representing such phenomena as global warming and climate change; it analyses whether the Earth is pictured either as a self-regulating mechanism, or as a highly-sophisticated organism, or as a conscious entity with a purpose for humans. Ecocriticism investigates the manner in which nature is broadcast in wildlife documentaries; it also approaches the questions of artificial

intelligence, cyborgs as well as queer and feral animals. The reason for abandoning these tropes in the present dissertation is because they do not appear, or appear very rarely, in Coetzee's works, unlike the presently discussed concepts, which, supplemented with philosophical insight, will serve in the forthcoming chapters to conduct an ecocritical analysis of John Maxwell Coetzee's selected works and his views over the ethical status of animals. The scrutiny will continue to investigate the field of animal studies, and philosophical reflections over the ethics of animality.

Chapter II

Environmental Philosophy, Animal Ethics, and Kant's Transcendental Illusion

Ecocriticism investigates the axiological aspects of nature writing, that is, it scrutinizes how literature can be conducive to morally right behavior with respect to the environmental crisis, nature conservation, and the rights of animals. As a politically involved mode of literary analysis, ecocriticism approaches literature as a means of counteracting the environmental crisis and of popularizing the eco-ethical qualities stipulated within the theoretical framework of environmental philosophy. Ecocritics are thus predominantly concerned with the normative qualities of literature, rather than with its descriptive or reflective functions. Moreover, following Jean-François Lyotard's postmodern view of art, ecocritical theoreticians approach literature as a paralogical type of artistic expression enabling people to recognize and attenuate the wrong of excessive nature exploitation. In the ecocritical paradigm literature is thus perceived as an element of practical ethics.

As an environmental type of literary criticism, ecocriticism is affected by the incongruity between holistic environmentalism, typical of nature conservation movements, and individualist environmentalism, characteristic of animal ethics. Ecocritics encounter the incongruity when analyzing the manner in which literary authors represent animals in their works. On the one hand, as a mode of literary analysis preoccupied with “the place,” ecocriticism adopts the holistic approach to the environment. On the other hand, ecocriticism is also concerned with the individualist focus on particular living beings,

represented by authors involved in animal studies. Admittedly, the holistic-individualist conflict undermines the tenets of both ecocriticism and environmental ethics.

The aim of the present chapter is to investigate the reasons for the conflict between holistic and individualist environmental ethics and also to advance Immanuel Kant's ethics as a possible solution to it. The chapter will scrutinize recent developments in environmental philosophy directed at providing an eco-ethical theory capable of mitigating the incongruity between contemporary animal studies and environmental ethics. In particular, the chapter will concentrate on the latest developments in the studies of moral value, ethical considerability, and the origins of respect for non-human nature. Since Kant's philosophy, especially his insight into the logic of transcendental illusion, will serve as the theoretical background for an ecocritical enquiry into the ethical status of animals in Coetzee's work, the chapter will examine Kant's approach to non-human nature, putting special emphasis on his association of aesthetics with ethics. The chapter will conclude with a short overview of contemporary Kantian approaches to the ethics of animality.

2.1. The Twentieth-Century Environment Philosophy

Before environmental ethics emerged, it was preceded by what is known as the “land ethic.” The term, “land ethic,” was first proposed by Aldo Leopold (1887-1949), a North American forest ranger who, in his 1949 collection of essays *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), considered a landmark in the American conservation movement,¹ proposed an ethic that would include not only human beings but also other species, landscape, and entire ecosystems. Leopold explained the history of ethics as an evolutionary phenomenon of the Darwinian type. Leopold referred to the sociobiological hypothesis that the

¹ The conservation movement, also known as nature conservation, is a social, political and environmental initiative whose objective is to promote the protection of natural resources, animals, plants and other organisms as well as their habitats.

presently known ethical norms evolved alongside natural selection. In “The Land Ethic” (1949), one of the most influential essays collected in the *Almanac*, Leopold claimed that ethics resulted from interpersonal relations. Subsequently, it incorporated more elaborate duties to society, such as trading commitments, which, in a course of natural development, were recognized as legally-enforced norms regulating the whole of human society. In Leopold's view, ethics underwent an evolutionary accretion of normative standards and moral obligations. He claimed that the process would encompass attitudes toward land and the environment. He devised an ethics which “enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.”² Leopold referred to the above-described process as “the third step in a sequence”³ of ethics enlargement.

Leopold did not remove or limit human ethics for the sake of the environment and its non-human inhabitants. On the contrary, he extended the standards of human ethics over other entities so that all living beings would be ascribed with equal moral considerability. Leopold's ethical system can thus be deemed as free of any speciesist bias. He compared the struggle for the recognition of the moral value of land and non-human communities with the liberation movements of women, African Americans, and other minorities. Although Leopold's comparison is controversial, numerous environmentalist thinkers consider its underlying principle to be correct. In an “Introduction” to Leopold's theory, Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III, the editors of the 2007 anthology of environmental ethics, wrote:

If ethical considerations govern the relations between individuals and the community around them, why do we restrict our understanding of that community only to the human community? Do not the communities we live in include the myriad other living things with whom we share the Earth, with whom we have entwined destinies? We are all bound up together. So why should only humans

² Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, ed. Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 39.

³ *Ibid.*, 38.

count? Exclusion must at least be carefully justified.⁴

Leopold's land ethics can be perceived as the first systematic attempt at regulating the above-mentioned concerns.

Due to its innovative character, Leopold's work did not initially receive much recognition. It was criticized for inaccuracy; some philosophers, especially at the American academia, refused to replace the idea of land as a commodity with the idea of land as a community; others thought land ethics impossible to be reconciled with human ethics.⁵ It was not until 1962 when Rachel Carson (1907-1964), an activist in the American conservationist movement, published her *Silent Spring* that the issue of ethical consideration for land, environment, and non-human communities gained substantial attention. Carson's study is frequently considered a landmark in the modern environmental movement because it engendered an actual change in the attitudes toward ecology and nature conservation. By demonstrating the consequences of pesticide overuse and excessive exploitation of natural resources, Carson instigated a sense of urgency among people to undertake political measures aimed at preventing the destruction of the Earth's natural habitats. Moreover, Carson motivated a considerable number of activists and academic scholars to become involved in the environmental movement. They began to plead for changes in the law so that environment and natural goods could legally be protected. Also, apart from affecting people's sensitivity and opinion, Carson's study initiated public discussion about the value of nature and its relation to other human values.⁶

Apart from favorable responses, Leopold, Carson, and their followers faced extensive criticism. Disapproving as they were, however, the critics of land ethics did not question the necessity of environmental ethics itself but rather the issues that the land ethics should

4 Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III, "Introduction: Ethics and Environmental Ethics," in Light and Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, 7.

5 Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 82.

6 Light and Rolston III, "Introduction," 1.

be concerned with. In particular, land ethicists were condemned for ascribing more value to ecological wholes than to particular beings, especially humans. The criticism soon led to a differentiation between holistic and individualist environmental ethics. Whereas environmental holists assign value to ecosystems, species, and landscape, environmental individualists concentrate on separate entities, advocating moral considerability for individual organisms. The former is characteristic mainly of nature conservation movements, while the latter comprises animal welfare initiatives, predominantly the animal rights movement. Nowadays, the differentiation has created a conflict which both incapacitates and stimulates environmental activism.⁷

Admittedly, Carson's 1962 publication of *Silent Spring* sensitized public opinion to the emerging environmental crisis. It also encouraged a substantial number of scholars to rediscover Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* and to deepen their insight into people's attitudes toward nature. However, only in the nineteen-eighties, three decades after its announcement in the *Almanac*, the idea of a land ethics became a widely discussed issue. Yet, while a number of scholars acknowledged the groundbreaking character of land ethics, others accused Leopold of misanthropy and of what was later called "eco-fascism." Tom Regan (b. 1938), an American philosopher specializing in animal rights, argued that Leopold's famous formula of a thing which "serves to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community [and which] is wrong when it tends otherwise,"⁸ was unacceptable because it allowed individuals to be sacrificed for the sake of the "greater good" of some biotic whole.⁹ An American scholar of Chatham College, PA, William H. Aiken (1947-2006), argued that in Leopold's paradigm "massive human die-outs would be good"¹⁰ because in land ethics most of people's activity proved severely detrimental to

7 Clare Palmer, "An Overview of Environmental Ethics," in Light and Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, 15-16.

8 Leopold, "The Land Ethic," 46.

9 Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), 262.

10 William Aiken, "Ethical Issues in Agriculture," in *Earthbound: New Introductory Essays in Environmental Ethics*, ed. Tom Regan (York: Random House, 1984), 269.

nature. In his 1996 article “Persons in Nature: Toward and Applicable and Unified Environmental Ethics,” Frederick Ferré (1933-2013), a University of Georgia professor of philosophy, rejected Leopold's ideas arguing that “taken as a guide for human culture, the land ethic [...] would lead towards classical fascism.”¹¹ Despite ample criticism, land ethics, understood as a holistic approach to the environment, has not ceased to influence the research for a successful ethics of nature. On the contrary, due to the criticism, holistic environmental ethics has clarified and consolidated its theoretical stance.

John Braid Callicott (b. 1941), a University of North Texas philosopher, is frequently regarded as the most important defender of Leopold's ideas. In his influential 1980 essay “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair,” Callicott reconsiders Leopold's idea of the socio-biological origins of human ethics. Adopting Darwin's evolutionary perspective, Callicott maintains that ethics not only improved the manner in which pre-civilisational societies organized their internal relations, but it also regulated their approach to the natural environment, the main source of their food, clothes, and construction materials. As Callicott argues, the prosperity of earliest communities was dependent on favorable natural conditions, such as accessibility of potable water, fertile soil, wood, and building stone. Therefore, without common care for a good condition of the surrounding environment, hardly any human community would have evolved into a civilization. Hence, in Callicott's view, holistic environmental ethics has not only been advantageous but also necessary for the civilizational progress of humanity. He also argues that land ethics reconciles those who ascribe moral worth solely to humans, the so-called ethical humanists, with those who extend ethics to other entities, referred to as humane moralists. However, despite his attempts at bringing environmentalism to terms with human ethics, Callicott makes an individual good conditional on the welfare of the constituent natural whole, qualifying

¹¹ Frederick Ferré, “Persons in Nature: Toward an Applicable and Unified Environmental Ethics,” *Ethics and the Environment* 1 (1996): 18.

himself as an environmental holist.¹²

To renounce the accusations of eco-fascism, Callicott points out that Leopold never advocated the substitution of human ethics with land ethics; what he advocated was the acknowledgment of human ethics as one of the most valuable achievements of human civilization which, through a process of evolutionary “accretion,” could evolve into environmental ethics. Defending Leopold, Callicott wrote: “if, as I here explain, Leopold is building the land ethic on theoretical foundations that he finds in Darwin, then it is obvious that with the advent of each new stage in the accreting development of ethics, the old stages are not erased or replaced, but added to.”¹³ Callicott also remarks that “the duties attendant upon citizenship in the biotic community (to preserve its integrity, stability, and beauty) do not cancel or replace the duties attendant on membership in the human global village (to respect human rights).”¹⁴ In light of Callicott's argumentation, the allegations of Leopold's eco-fascism appear groundless.

Although Callicott's defense of Leopold's land ethics seems well-justified, misanthropy among land-ethicists is still a pending issue. Admittedly, in the second part of his “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair,” Callicott prioritizes the community before the individual. He claims that, for the sake of nature's welfare, people should only be twice as numerous as bears, and that anti-humanism, at least in some contexts, could be perceived as ecologically correct. In his later works, Callicott has tried to alleviate his misanthropic views. He continues to argue that humans as a species are not detrimental to nature, for they have always been part of it, but what is harmful are the rate and scope in which people affect the environment. Callicott formulates, under the influence of Leopold, the following idea: “[a] thing is right when it tends to disturb the biotic community only at

12 John Braid Callicott, “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair,” *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1980): 311-338.

13 John Braid Callicott, “The Land Ethic,” in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Dale Jamieson (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 211.

14 Ibid.

normal spatial and temporal scales. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”¹⁵ However, Callicott does not specify which “scales” should be perceived as “normal” and which as abnormal.¹⁶

One of the main advocates of the individualist environmental ethics is an Australian moral philosopher Peter Singer, known for his *Animal Liberation* (1975), a work considered canonical in the animal rights theory. Singer stepped out against holistic environmentalism together with Tom Regan, with whom he co-edited the 1976 collection of critical essays *Animal Rights and Human Obligation*. Although Singer and Regan soon parted, their individualist ethics was adopted and popularized, although not without criticism, by Donald VanDeVeer (b. 1939), a professor of philosophy at North Carolina State University, Robin Attfield (b. 1931), a professor of philosophy at Cardiff University, and Gary E. Varner (b. 1957), an environmental ethicist and a Texas A&M University scholar. The main subject of their attention concerns the value of nature. As environmental individualists, they attach more value to individual organisms than to natural wholes. However, they do value landscape, ecosystems, and species by arguing that natural wholes are morally considerable because they house communities of morally important individual organisms. By “an individual organism” Singer and his followers mean “the state of affairs [that] generated the organism”¹⁷ and not the organism itself. Accordingly, what is ethically valuable in the individualist environmental paradigm are not objects, things or organisms themselves, but rather “the states of affairs” within the given entities.¹⁸ In his influential article entitled “Not for Humans Only: the Place of Non-Humans” (1979), Singer argues that ethics ought to adopt the individualist approach to evolve from a solely anthropocentric discourse into a coherent value system including non-human beings;

¹⁵ Ibid., 216; cf. Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 46.

¹⁶ Palmer, “An Overview of Environmental Ethics,” 24.

¹⁷ Clare Palmer, *Oxford Theological Monographs: Environmental Ethics and Process Thinking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 43.

¹⁸ Cf. Palmer, “An Overview of Environmental Ethics,” 19.

otherwise, the propagated accretion of moral sentiment to non-human entities will be limited and unjust. Singer also argues that rationality is not ethically binding because it is characteristic exclusively of people. Instead, he claims that solely sentience, understood as the capacity to feel pleasure and pain, constitutes the ultimate, morally obligating factor. Sound ethics ought to be based on the sentient interests of individual beings, rather than on their collective beauty, usefulness, or helpfulness to people or other creatures. Should human harm and well-being be favored before the harm and welfare of other creatures, solely because humans are rational and non-humans are not, ethics would be based on “speciesism,” that is, on a biased presupposition that people morally matter more than non-human beings. In Singer's view, organisms unable to feel pain and pleasure are not ethically considerable. He justifies his view by claiming that non-sentient organisms are valueless for lack of conscious interests “as non-conscious beings have no interests, so non-conscious life lacks intrinsic value.”¹⁹ The question remains whether such a claim is not yet another type of speciesism.²⁰

Singer does not consider landscape, plants, non-sentient animals, and whole species as morally important. He rejects comatose people and those in the so-called permanent vegetative state as morally considerable because being unconscious they cannot have interests. Significantly, within Singer's hedonistic utilitarianism, non-sentient people can be killed without moral restrictions. Singer also faces a serious difficulty with feral and stock animals as they are usually destructive to the ecosystems they come to inhabit. On the one hand, Singer argues that they need to be protected due to their sentience. On the other hand, however, feral and farm animals are usually invasive species which destroy local ecosystems inhabited by species indigenous of the ecosystems. In one of his essays, “Animals,” Singer recognizes the difficulty, admitting that he cannot reconcile the

19 Singer, “Not for Humans Only: The Place of Non-Humans in Environmental Issues,” in Light and Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*,” 60.

20 Cf. Gary E. Varner, “Sentientism,” in Jamieson, *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 192-193.

interests of sentient animals detrimental to their environments with the overall value of the environments and their native organisms. The issue concerns abundant stocks grazing on pastures, rats on formerly rat-free islands, or feral rabbits brought to Australia by colonizers and destroying the continent's flora. Clearly, in Singer's view, death is morally condemnable solely because it entails suffering and pain; should killing be painless, death would be morally neutral. It appears that Singer would allow for killing animals as long as they did not get distressed during their slaughter. In this respect, Singer's argument lacks accuracy and, at times, may seem short-sighted, if not self-contradictory.²¹

Despite his anti-speciesist declarations, Singer is frequently found propagating speciesist views. It is particularly visible when he claims that people deserve more moral consideration than other beings because of their typically human capacity for reflective self-consciousness. Paradoxically, Singer uses speciesist arguments in order to defend an animal theory which aims at subduing the speciesist prejudice.²² Despite his inconsistencies, however, Singer has inspired some thinkers who seem more successful at improving the quality of the individualist argument. Donald VanDeVeer replaces the conscious – non-conscious binary with a scale of psychological complexity of organisms. According to VanDeVeer, the more psychologically sophisticated an organism is, the stronger the claim for recognizing the organism's moral worth. However, VanDeVeer's differentiation, reminiscent of Aristotle's "scale of nature," does not amend Singer's speciesism but it only displaces its base from sentience to psychological complexity. VanDeVeer renounces moral considerability to plants, natural environments, and lower organisms, whereas he assigns it to more psychologically advanced animals. He concludes that since humans are the most psychologically developed beings they deserve more moral respect than any other animals. He does not recognize comatose humans as ethically

21 Peter Singer, "Animals," in Jamieson, *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 422-423.

22 Singer, "Not for Humans Only," 61-63.

valuable.²³

Robin Attfield offers a broader perspective than VanDeVeer. He renounces the presupposition that value is dependent on the quality of one's experience. Instead, Attfield argues that it is the organism's ability to flourish and develop which should be morally important. Attfield is followed by Gary E. Varner who bases ethical value on the entity's ability to satisfy its interests. In Varner's view, the beings that have desires, and not only natural instincts, take priority over the entities which cannot desire, such as earth, water, and air. As of people, Varner maintains that they are ethically more valuable than the rest of creation because, contrary to other beings, they are the only known creatures that possess "ground-projects," that is, life-long desires necessitating conscious involvement. What renders a being morally valuable in Varner's view is then its ability to make plans. However, he does not explain how to differentiate between humans' and non-humans' desires.²⁴

The most frequent criticism directed at the holistic and individualist approaches to environmental ethics is their implied anthropocentrism. The proponents of both stances have also frequently been accused of tacit speciesism. Tom Regan argues that it is an instance of human prejudice to decide whether an organism deserves moral worth or not, basing solely on its ability to feel pain and pleasure, to flourish, or to fulfill its ends. He claims that hedonistic utilitarianism, similarly to the holistic approach and deep ecology, justifies cruelty and killing individual organisms as long as it augments the welfare of the surviving organisms. In Regan's view, individual organisms as well as larger natural formations should be protected not because they have desires but rather because they possess inherent rights. He asserts that the rights can be derived from the "subject-of-a-

23 Donald VanDeVeer, "Interspecific Justice," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 22 (1979): 55-79.

24 Palmer, "An Overview of Environmental Ethics," 20.

life” criterion, that is, from the mere fact of being alive.²⁵ He argues that for the interests of living organisms to be respected, the rights must be demonstrated, acknowledged, and finally respected. However, Regan fails to specify the exact character of the rights or the principles of their implementation in legislation, thus rendering his instructions impractical.²⁶

Although Singer and Regan are both considered environmental individualists, Regan's position is described as deontological, while that of Singer as consequentialist. The difference is that the latter concentrates on the organism's experiences, whereas the former focuses solely on the organism's existence itself. As Regan remarks, it is “the organism itself that is valuable, not what it is doing.”²⁷ For environmental deontologists, then, value resides in the mere fact that a being exists and strives to survive. Although the deontological views entered environmental ethics in the nineteen-eighties, it is believed that they originate in the ideas of Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), a German-French theologian, philosopher, and medical missionary in Africa. In his 1923 work *The Philosophy of Civilisation*, Schweitzer argued that every living creature was characterized by its proper “will-to-live.” Because of having “wills-to-live,” claimed Schweitzer, man was obliged to value living things. Since in Schweitzer's theory all “wills-to-live” were of equal value, no organism should be favored in terms of its moral considerability. In his view, to kill a cockroach would seem as wrong as to kill a tiger. However, with regard to humans, the philosopher renounced his egalitarianism, considering people superior to other beings. Schweitzer failed to provide convincing reasons for his special regard for humans.²⁸

25 However, in his 1981 article “The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic,” Regan maintains that rights derive from sentience, that is, from the capacity for consciousness of pain and pleasure. He changes his views in favor of “the subject-of-a-life” argument in *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983).

26 Tom Regan, “Animal Rights: What's in a Name?” in Light and Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, 69-70, 73, 243.

27 Regan, “Animal Rights: What's in a Name?,” 233.

28 Palmer, “An Overview of Environmental Ethics,” 21-22.

Paul Taylor (b. 1949), a professor of philosophy at New York's Brooklyn College, is one of the most important contemporary environmental ethicists whose views seem to derive mainly from Schweitzer's deontology of living entities. Similarly to Schweitzer, Taylor advocates a life-centered system of environmental ethics, claiming that people are obliged to protect other living creatures not because of their sentience, or because they are able to realize their interests, but because they live, and as living creatures they are inherently valuable. Taylor has named his approach "the biocentric outlook on nature," arguing that "the claim that humans by their very nature are superior to other species is a groundless claim [which] must be rejected as nothing more than an irrational bias in [humans'] own favor."²⁹ Therefore, the bias is caused by the narrowness of human point of view. As Taylor argues, people select specifically human characteristics, such as rational thought, aesthetic creativity, and self-determination, and then they measure the value of other beings in relation to the characteristics. According to Taylor, the above reasoning is prejudiced, and so it should be refuted as morally wrong. He concludes that the only condition under which there could emerge a true environmental ethics, i.e., an ethics based on respect for others' needs, is the disposal of humans' preconceived dominance over the world.³⁰

Both individualist approaches, the consequentialist and the deontological, suffer serious faults. The most frequent objection concerns their implicit anthropocentrism. In his 1977 article "The Liberation of Nature," John Rodman (1933-2007), a scholar at Pitzer College, California, argued that the consequentialist practice of equating value with experience was clearly anthropocentric as it imposed human perspective on non-human beings. He claimed that individualist eco-ethicists both disregarded the importance of natural diversity and ignored the value of ecosystems, species and other environmental

²⁹ Paul Taylor, "The Ethics of Respect of Nature," in Light and Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, 75.

³⁰ Ibid., 74-79, 82-83.

wholes, frequently failing to differentiate between domesticated, wild, and endangered animals. According to Rodman, individualist eco-ethicists also failed to identify the types of treatment required by animals. In his view, by downplaying the value of nature, environmental individualists belittled the importance of the environment as the preliminary condition of earthly life. Rodman reminds of Callicott in whose view environmental individualists are also wrong to reject predation, death, and violence as morally wrong. As argues Callicott, animal hunting and death are natural phenomena that frequently improve the quality of ecosystems by sustaining their balanced development. Following Callicott, Rodman also stresses the importance of parasites, bacteria, viruses, and vermin for the functioning of various types of ecosystems. The difficulty faced by individualist ethicists is whether life forms considered non-sentient and bothersome for humans should be valued in the same way as more advanced organisms, especially those beneficial to people.³¹

Holistic environmental ethics appears to settle the above-mentioned difficulties, but it suffers other equally important limitations. As already mentioned, it disregards the value of individual animals, it does not appreciate the need to protect endangered species, regarding them as insignificant to their ecosystems, and in extreme cases it promotes misanthropy. Consequently, there appears a need for a theory that would reconcile environmental holists with environmental individualists, enabling larger communities to overcome the emerging environmental crisis in a thorough and coordinated fashion. The theory ought to account for both the interests of individual beings and for the welfare of entire species and their ecosystems.

The first reconciliatory theory worth attention was proposed in 1983 by Eric Katz, a New Jersey Institute of Technology scholar, in his article entitled “Is There a Place for

31 John Rodman, “The Liberation of Nature,” *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 20 (1977); Palmer, “An Overview of Environmental Ethics,” 23; John Braid Callicott, “Non-Anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1988): 301.

Animals in the Moral Consideration of Nature?” Katz compares the individualist approach to environmental ethics with the holistic one, and he comes to the conclusion that if any of the approaches were to take precedence over the other, it would have to comply with the principal tenets of human traditional ethics. It would also need to “accord with the general policies of environmentalism, i.e., of environmental protection.”³² In Katz's view, the holistic stance meets more of the above-mentioned requirements than the individualist one. Not only is the former broader in scope than the latter, but it also protects the whole of earthly ecosystems whose existence, well-being, and efficiency are of primary importance to all forms of life. The value of ecosystemic wholes takes priority over the worth of the individuals inhabiting the wholes. However, in order to foreclose any possible accusations of misanthropy and holistic bias, Katz argues that environmental ethics should consist of two types of duties, namely the primary duty to environmental wholes, and the secondary duty to take care of individual beings. As Katz claims, “the secondary principle [...] serves to limit the excessive use of the primary principle in cases where it should not apply [so that] rare and endangered species can be protected despite their irrelevance to ecosystemic health and stability.”³³ Accordingly, if the welfare of natural entireties is not an issue, Katz maintains that the manner in which people influence the environment should be assessed by their treatment of individual organisms. However, the rule does not refer to domesticated animals because, in Katz's view, they are mere “human artifacts,” or “the instruments of human deliberate action,” thus remaining “simply an *irrelevancy* from the standpoint of environmental ethics.”³⁴ Whether the difficulty concerning the value of domestic animals can be resolved by treating it as “simply an irrelevancy,” especially in the framework of environmental ethics, remains doubtful and requires further justification.

32 Eric Katz, “Is There a Place for Animals in the Moral Consideration of Nature?,” in Light and Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, 85-86.

33 Ibid., 91.

34 Ibid., 93 (emphasis).

In spite of Katz's faults, his argument is still noteworthy, mainly because it indicates the manner of reconciling holistic eco-ethics with the individualist approach in a single comprehensive theory. As other ethicists, Katz has inspired ample criticism. In his 1988 article "Against the Moral Considerability of Ecosystems," Harley Cahen (b. 1956), a contemporary American ethicist, argues that, contrary to Katz, the overall value of individual organisms is greater than the value of large environmental wholes. The view can be referred to as the rule of environmental emergency. Cahen supplements the rule by claiming that moral considerability derives from the fact of having violable interests. If an entity cannot be harmed, or its interests violated, Cahen does not think the entity as morally obligating. He argues that only living things have moral worth because their interest in living can be violated by killing them. Accordingly, it is the fact of "having life" which makes entities morally valuable. On the other hand, and contrary to Singer, Cahen does not make ethics dependent on one's capacity for feeling pain or pleasure, but he pinpoints to life as the ultimate condition of moral value. Therefore, as Cahen maintains, primitive animals, plants, and other non-sentient organisms, as long as they are alive, do possess moral worth.³⁵

While explaining his reasons for posing life as the sufficient ground for ethical considerability, Cahen points to the "goal-directedness" of life. By "goal-directedness" he means the motivation of living things to grow, develop, adjust to changing circumstances, and pursue what he calls "the goals of life." In his view, even plants are "goal-directed," which makes them morally valuable as sentient organisms. Importantly, moral worth derives not only from goal-directedness but also from life. Therefore, Cahen rejects goal-directed machines, such as guided missiles, thermostatic radiators, and chess-playing computers as morally insignificant. Similarly, he denies moral considerability to

35 Harley Cahen, "Against the Moral Considerability of Ecosystems," in Light and Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, 114-116.

ecosystems, claiming that they do not have goals for they only engender “behavioral byproducts” that may look like goals. By “behavioral byproducts” he means incidental outcomes resulting from “individual activities aimed exclusively at the individuals' own goals.”³⁶ He refers to the stability and resilience of ecosystems as byproducts or mere tendencies in order to denote nature's lack of intrinsic interests. In his view, ecosystems cannot be wronged or benefited, therefore, they do not necessitate moral consideration.³⁷

Similarly to Katz, Cahen argues that the individualist and holistic approaches to environmental ethics need to be reconciled. Unlike Katz, however, Cahen has accorded more value to individual beings, claiming that the overall worth of ecosystems derives from the conglomerate worths of every single organism contributing to the ecosystems. Consequently, by favoring the individualist approach, Cahen reinforces the individualist-holist division within environmental ethics. A notable attempt at reconciling the division was made by Gary E. Varner in his 1995 essay “Can Animal Rights Activists Be Environmentalists?” According to Varner, environmental individualists could agree with environmental holists to limit the population of a species provided the reduction will enhance the overall welfare of the surviving rest. Varner develops his theory by analyzing the so-called therapeutic hunting of intrusive or overpopulated species. Environmentalists often demand that a given herd be removed or its number lowered if its presence is malicious to the stability and integrity of the ecosystem it occupies. Similarly, animal rights activists may consent to lowering the head-count of some stock to prevent the stock from overgrowing and endangering the lives of individual organisms. Varner concludes that environmental individualists can come to terms with holists for practical reasons, although he does not specify the exact conditions of their agreement.³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., 117.

³⁷ Ibid., 114-117.

³⁸ Gary E. Varner, “Can Animal Rights Activists Be Environmentalists?,” in Light and Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, 95.

Varner's theory suffers a substantial drawback which seriously impairs its practical applicability. For strictly utilitarian reasons, he allows for preventive killing of humans, as evinced in the following excerpt: "some number of innocent human beings ought to be killed to prevent foreseeable deaths of some larger number."³⁹ In his view, there are two ways to prevent the human overpopulation of the Earth, avoid famine, and counteract shortages in resources: either people collectively recognize the threat and methodically lower their birthrate, or they limit their number by killing part of the human population. Since the former is unrealizable on a global scale, lest the matter be left to such factors as starvation, climate change, or other natural phenomena, the latter appears inevitable. Varner admits that his conclusions are barely acceptable due to humanitarian reasons.⁴⁰

Although Varner's elucidation is hardly satisfactory, it instigated an ample response which subsequently developed into a discussion about environmental values, their origin, distribution in nature, and their relation to the values of traditional human ethics. It stimulated research into the ways in which natural values could be recognized and incorporated into the existing value systems. In the course of subsequent research, there has appeared a distinction between the instrumental and non-instrumental values of natural objects. In environmental philosophy, instrumental value is assigned to natural objects due to their utility for particular purposes. In this regard, natural objects are valuable because they are employed as a means to some end. Soil is instrumentally valuable because it enables the growth of plants, it is a repository of nutriment and waste, and it functions as a building material. Soil is precious not because of itself but because of its usefulness to other organisms. Soil would have no worth if there were no organisms to benefit from its goods.

Donald Worster (b. 1941), a University of Kansas scholar, claims in his *Nature's*

³⁹ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Economy (1985) that the value of nature is instrumental when it is approached as a “storehouse of resources to be organized and used by people”⁴¹ for their own purposes. However, if nature is perceived as an end in itself, that is, as existing for its own sake, not for reasons external to it, Worster deems its value as non-instrumental. John O'Neill, a British professor of political economy at the University of Manchester, refers to the non-instrumental value as intrinsic, that is, as derivative of an object's inherent properties. He defines intrinsic value as objective and independent of external valuations. While O'Neill claims that natural objects are inherently valuable having intrinsic worth independently of human valuations, he nonetheless contends that they do not necessarily require human respect or any other special regard. In O'Neill's view, the “defender of nature's intrinsic value still needs to show that such a value contributes to the well-being of human agents.”⁴² Apparently, as inherent value objectively does not entail moral considerability, successful eco-ethics requires rendering the value of nature as subjectively binding for humans. O'Neill does not specify how the rendition should be carried out.

O'Neill's skepticism raises other important doubts concerning environmental value: whether environmental value is anthropogenic, characteristic of the objects valued by people, or whether it already exists in the world and only needs to be recognized by humans. There are two approaches toward the issue: the subjectivist and the objectivist. Considered through the subjectivist approach, value is anthropogenic; it is conferred by humans, and it is also necessarily anthropocentric as it reflects the assessed object's usefulness to men. However, as Callicott argued, there are also types of value, among them aesthetic value, which are anthropogenic not being anthropocentric. Accordingly, an aesthetically valuable object is prized not only because it is considered useful but because

41 Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: The Roots of Ecology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 260.

42 John O'Neill, “The Varieties of Intrinsic Value,” in Light and Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, 131-132.

of its beauty, uniqueness, and sublimity. People can value a thing intrinsically, according to its specific characteristics, regardless of the thing's instrumental worth. Tourism provides evidence for the above claim: the main reason why people visit such places as the Great Canyon or Australian Great Reef is not because of their usefulness to achieve some goal, but rather because of the sights' unique aesthetic qualities. The reason for visiting them is themselves, that is, their intrinsic features recognized by people as valuable beyond human instrumental use. Dale Jamieson (b. 1947), an American environmentalist from New York University, draws a similar parallel between nature and art. In his view, great masterpieces of painting, sculpture, and music are of derivative value, assigned to the masterpieces owing to their internal qualities, and not because they are useful for obtaining human goals. Therefore, due to applying his argumentation to land ethics, Jamieson should be deemed a subjectivist who, similarly to Callicott, has recognized that value is always anthropogenic, while not necessarily being anthropocentric.⁴³

Bryan G. Norton (b. 1944), a professor of philosophy at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, is a subjectivist thinker who questions the non-anthropocentric understanding of value, arguing that value is made by humans and hence it is always human-centered. In his 1984 essay "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism," he claims that in order to effectively protect endangered species, it is enough to incorporate ecological issues into human ethics. There is no need for separate environmental ethics. What is necessary, instead, are an understanding of the consequences resulting from the environmental crisis and sensitivity to the life conditions of animals. Norton maintains that the extension of moral considerability over the non-human part of nature will benefit people by enhancing the sustainability of the Earth. He refers to his stance as weakly anthropocentric. Since Norton's inclusion of non-humans in

43 Palmer, "An Overview of Environmental Ethics," 17; Dale Jamieson, "Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethics," in *Morality's Progress: Essays on Humans, Other Animals, and the Rest of Nature*, ed. Dale Jamieson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), chap. 14.

general ethics lacks empirical confirmation, it can be claimed that his weak anthropocentrism is based on pure speculation, thus lacking practical applicability.⁴⁴

Eugene Hargrove (b. 1944), a professor of philosophy at the University of North Texas, presents weak anthropocentrism as a workable method of handling the ethical issues raised by environmental studies. In his 1992 essay "Weak Anthropocentric Intrinsic Value," Hargrove presents the following tenets of his environmental philosophy:

While I do not think that labels are important, it is useful to call the view I represent weak anthropocentrism at least until it becomes generally recognised that anthropocentrism does not imply instrumentalism. I do not think that it is possible for humans to avoid being anthropocentric, given that whatever we humans value will always be from human (or anthropocentric) point of view. Even when we try to imagine what it might be like to have the point of view of (or be) a bat, or a mountain, in my view, we are still looking at the world anthropocentrically – the way a human imagines that a non-human might look at the world.⁴⁵

Similarly to Norton, Hargrove argues that all values in nature are anthropocentric because nature is always seen from a human perspective. In his view, nature can also be valued intrinsically. However, due to the human presence, such an intrinsic value is weak, in contrast to a strong intrinsic value, which exists in the absence of humans. Although non-human intrinsic values may exist, Hargrove argues that people cannot recognize them, yet a "simple reminder that humans are fully capable of valuing things non-instrumentally and have been doing so for thousands of years is all that is needed."⁴⁶ In Hargrove's view, a human conscious decision to value and respect nature is only necessary for environmental ethics, either holistic or individualist, to be binding. Mere awareness of a value does not induce moral behavior; what is necessary is a will to recognize eco-values as underlying the ethical imperatives of people's moral judgements. Curiously enough, Hargrove's view

44 Bryan G. Norton, "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism," in *Environmental Ethics* 6, no. 2 (1984): 131.

45 Eugene Hargrove, "Weak Anthropocentric Intrinsic Value," *The Monist* 75, no. 2 (1992): 201.

46 Ibid., 199.

seems to reflect Kant's idea of good will, i.e., a will which operates on its own universal law. Kantian is also Hargrove's claim that intrinsic value operates similarly to beauty; Hargrove argues that aesthetic sensibility to the beauty of nature can stimulate one's moral response to the environmental crisis. In spite of his insight, Hargrove does not explain how the decision to value is determined; whether it is made *a priori* or *a posteriori* to experience, and what shapes its outcome.⁴⁷

Unlike subjectivists, represented by Norton and Hargrove, objectivists argue that intrinsic value is not conferred by people as it exists in the world independently of human control. In the objectivist eco-ethics, intrinsic value is an inherent property of natural objects which people need to recognize through critical reflection. If people do not recognize it, however, the objects are still ethically valuable, although the value remains unacknowledged for humans. An objectivist view is advanced by Holmes Rolston III (b. 1932), a University of Colorado scholar, who in his 1991 article "Value of Nature and the Nature of Value" argues that nature is the sole holder of its value, but without human recognition, the value remains inert and latent. Rolston III maintains that "humans carry the lamp that lights up value, although we require the fuel that nature provides,"⁴⁸ which he later explains by claiming that "humans are the measurers, the valuers of things, even when we measure what they are in themselves."⁴⁹ Value necessitates human presence because it can only be identified by people through their critical insight. Without human recognition, environmental value is insignificant; it does not affect people, so it does not effectuate change in their attitudes toward nature. In Rolston III's view, the most fundamental of environmental values is "systemic value," applicable to landscape, habitats and environments. It refers to the preliminary conditions of earthly life, thus underlying

47 Ibid., 193; see Mary Gregor, "Introduction," in Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

48 Holmes Rolston III, "Value of Nature and the Nature of Value," in Light and Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, 144.

49 Ibid..

other values. In his paradigm, value is anthropogenic, without automatically being anthropocentric.⁵⁰

John O'Neill is also considered an environmental objectivist. Although in his view natural entities are intrinsically valuable, O'Neill maintains that intrinsic value does not entail moral considerability for the valued object. Therefore, people are not morally obliged to realize the good of natural objects, even if the objects are intrinsically valuable. O'Neill identifies an important gap between values and oughts, claiming that the former does not always occasion the latter. To bridge the gap, there is a need of a human agent able to render natural values as morally binding. O'Neill emphasizes that non-human beings should be respected because their welfare is conducive to human well-being. Consequently, value of natural objects does not have to be anthropogenic, but it is certainly anthropocentric, hence it needs *a priori* to be recognized by men to be morally binding.⁵¹

Despite their different stances, there are a number of environmental ethicists who have tried to reconcile value subjectivists with value objectivists. In her 1996 essay "Source and Locus of Intrinsic Value: A Reexamination," Keekok Lee (b. 1938), a University of Manchester scholar, attempts the task by distinguishing between two types of intrinsic value: mutely enacted value and recognized-articulated value. The former is characteristic of both humans and non-humans; it is associated with the organism's natural drive to sustain its functional integrity, and it occurs in the world independently of human judgement. Lee claims that mutely enacted value indicates things valuable "for themselves." Therefore, mutely enacted values are objective, non-anthropocentric, and non-anthropogenic. On the other hand, recognized-articulated values are associated solely with humans and result from their unique type of self-consciousness, reason, and linguistic

⁵⁰ Ibid., 143, 150.

⁵¹ O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," 138-139.

capacities. Recognized-articulated values are anthropocentric. Lee refers to objects characterized by the recognized-articulated value as valuable “in themselves.” The source of recognized-articulated values is only in human consciousness, thus they are anthropogenic. Consequently, as she points out, “in a world without human consciousness [...], there are not recognized-articulated values but only mutely enacted values. In a world with human consciousness, there are both.”⁵²

Admittedly, Lee repeats Rolston III's claim that nature is an independent holder of intrinsic value and people are its beholders, passively recognizing certain entities as either valuable or valueless. However, Lee is more specific than Rolston III; she claims that the human ability to recognize the value of other beings makes them possess a value which she calls “enacted value.” Lee connects the enacted value with rationality and the ability to make logical moral judgements. As she argues, people value other beings out of a reasoned conviction that such beings need to be valued, not out of belief or custom. Accordingly, Lee maintains that it is reason that bestows moral sensitivity on people. As she later admits, her “approach is in line with the ethics of Kant, who argues that humans alone, among the species known to us, have the rationality necessary to be capable of morality.”⁵³ Although Lee does not express it explicitly, the above claim implies that the source of recognized-articulated value, characteristic solely of humans, is the capacity of rational morality. Animals, as devoid of reason, self-consciousness, and logic, possess only the mutely enacted type of intrinsic value; they are not subjects of morality. However, animals can be objects of morality as long as animal value is granted by reason, that is, when respect for animals is recognized as logically necessary. Not only does Lee observe the Kantian urge for basing morality on logic, but she also appears to reconcile the individualist and holistic stances of environmental ethics by assigning to animals and

⁵² Keekok Lee, “In Source and Locus of Intrinsic Value: A Reexamination,” in Light and Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, 155.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 157.

ecological wholes different types of intrinsic value. Lee's strategy seems interesting also because it reconciles the subjectivist claim that value is an anthropogenic with the objectivist argumentation according to which value exists independently of human agency. Accordingly, while the recognized-articulated value complies with the subjectivist worldview of anthropogenic ethicists, the mutely-enacted value meets the objectivist requirements, confirming the anthropocentric stance. Lee's two inflections of intrinsic values also comply with the individualist and holistic stances. However, while her thesis alleviates the dispute within environmental ethics, it reinforces the dualism between humans and animals, the original source of the conflict. Despite the inconsistency, however, her theory, combined with the weak anthropocentrism of Norton and Hargrove, seems most likely to reconcile the conflicts within eco-ethics.⁵⁴

As research shows, environmental ethics abandons its initial separatist character, typical of land ethics and deep ecology, and is directed toward reconciling positions with traditional human ethics. Clearly, both environmental individualists and environmental holists have generally opted for an ethics of accretion which begins with humans and extends to include other objects of nature. Leopold, Callicott, and Rolston III, widely-known proponents of nature's intrinsic value, seem to assent to the accreting model of ethics. Admittedly, being embedded in everyday life, subjectivist anthropocentric environmental ethics appears more realistic than the other approaches, also due to its closeness to traditional moral systems. It is more practical also because it presupposes an evolution of values and attitudes toward nature, rather than a revolutionary paradigm shift of the present value systems. The arguments of Norton, Hargrove, Jamieson, and Lee, although still in need to be verified, do provide a rather convincing theoretical framework for the change. However, a substantial number of researchers concentrate on *why* non-human entities should be incorporated into human ethical systems. Moral considerability

⁵⁴ Ibid., 155-159.

of natural objects is frequently justified with the duty resulting from the object's value. Accordingly, there have emerged various theories bridging the gap between values and oughts. The most elaborate approach seems to have been offered by Keekok Lee. However, rarely have the researchers discussed *how* to bridge the gap, *how* people should apply moral oughts to non-humans basing on traditional ethics, and *how* nature in general should be respected. At the same time, there has been little insight into the methodology and strategies of incorporating natural beings into standard ethics. The thinker that seems to have provided the most convincing solution to the question is the eighteenth-century German philosopher from Königsberg, Immanuel Kant. The solution is termed in philosophy as the Kantian transcendental illusion.

2.2. The Logic of Kantian Transcendental Illusion

In 1781, Kant published his *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which he intended to answer the question of what knowledge could be obtained with absolute certitude and without any qualification. Kant investigated if the type of knowledge pursued by his day metaphysics, *a priori* and independent of experience, was achievable solely through rational reflection. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he aimed at investigating the “real use” of reason, that is, whether it contained “in itself the source of certain conceptions and principles.”⁵⁵ He did not seek what one could know but how something could be known. Accordingly, Kant was not interested in the object of knowledge but in the procedural aspect of cognition, its mode, and the grounds for the universal validity of knowledge. He began his investigations by recognizing that traditional metaphysics was mistaken to presuppose the independence of sure knowledge from sensual experience. Instead, Kant argued that substantive

⁵⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (1781; Hazelton: Pennsylvania State University Electronic Classic Series, 2010), 20, 249.

knowledge resulted from the application of the *a priori* forms of reason to the empirical content delivered by senses. Accordingly, it was impossible in Kant's view to know anything about the world with absolute certainty without relying on sensual input, or intuition, as he also referred to sensibilia.

Despite his emphasis on the empirical part of cognition, Kant was not an empiricist. Rather, he tried to unite empiricism with rationalism, the two prevailing philosophical outlooks of his time, by demonstrating the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge. According to Kant, synthetic *a priori* knowledge is derived from the concepts innate in human reason, such as the ideas of space, causation, and number, without any reference to empirical experience. Although necessary and universal, synthetic *a priori* knowledge does not refer to the objective reality, nor to the reality outside human perception, but it is solely related to how reality appears in human consciousness. Due to the limitation, claimed Kant, reliable metaphysics can only investigate the preliminary conditions of empirical knowledge, thus no valid metaphysical claims can be made about non-empirical objects, called by Kant “things-in-themselves” or “*noumena*.” Admittedly, most of Kant's investigations into the systemic possibility of knowledge, known as “transcendental philosophy,” rests on the assumption that actual knowledge is derived from the application of the *a priori* forms of cognition to the content supplied by sensibility.

Kant's *Critique* is based on a set of necessary presuppositions about the nature of reason and the mechanisms of cognition. He refers to the presumptions as the so-called forms of reason, distinguishing three of them: the forms of sensibility (space and time), the forms of the understanding (the categories of the understanding), and the forms of pure reason (the transcendental ideas of soul, freedom, and an absolute being). Kant's revolutionary contribution to philosophy is his hypothesis that the forms of sensibility do not come with sensations. Therefore, space and time are not features of the empirical

world, but they are rather the mind's subjective modes of coordinating sensibilia. Reason applies space and time to sensation to make it fit man's cognitive apparatus. Without the forms of sensibility people would have no access to the data delivered by the senses. In Kant's view, space and time are the initial prerequisites for knowledge.⁵⁶

Kant applied the same strategy to the forms of the understanding, also referred to as the categories of the understanding. According to Kant, the categories are the *a priori* forms of cognition which render the objects of experience, already processed through the forms of sensibility, into objects of valid empirical knowledge. Although the categories are employed to engender empirical knowledge, they are not objects of sense experience themselves. They cannot be perceived as things with the temporal and spatial dimensions. Instead, the categories are reason's presuppositions, theoretical placeholders, necessary to account for how the understanding transforms experience into valid knowledge; they possess "the remarkable peculiarity of making possible the very experience which is also [the categories'] ground of proof."⁵⁷ Admittedly, reason assumes the categories so as to satisfy the demand of its own completeness, to legitimize empirical knowledge and, at the same time, to prevent metaphysics from disintegration.⁵⁸

Kant devised a system of the *a priori* forms of cognition because he questioned the possibility of objective transcendental knowledge, by which he meant knowledge independent of experience. However, although absolute transcendent knowledge is unobtainable, reason still seeks things, asks questions, or even postulates concepts exceeding empirical experience. Accordingly, in the opening sentence of the first *Critique*, Kant argued that "human reason, in one sphere of its cognition, is called upon to consider questions, which it cannot decline, as they are presented by its own nature, but which it

56 Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 424.

57 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 494.

58 Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, 245.

cannot answer, as they transcend every faculty of the mind.”⁵⁹ On the one hand, reason strives to keep its synthetic integrity, on the other, it infringes on its integrity by asking questions defeating its cognitive capacities. In order to mitigate the conflict, reason has a recourse to the so-called “transcendental illusion,” defined by Kant as the mechanism of regarding “the subjective necessity of a certain connection of our conceptions [as] an objective necessity of the determination of things in themselves.”⁶⁰ Consequently, bound by the requirement of its own unity, reason engenders an illusion which transposes the requirement onto the things beyond experience, that is, the *noumena*, or the things-in-themselves. It could be argued that the transcendent illusion underlies a structure of cognition devised by Kant to demonstrate the consistency of empirical and transcendental knowledge, and to underpin metaphysics as a reliable science. An insight into the structure is called by Kant a “transcendental philosophy.”⁶¹

The questions that reason asks itself are concerned with the traditional problems of cosmology: the origins of the world, the reality of freedom, and the existence of soul and God. In Kant's view, reason provides proof for both supporting and refuting these questions, thus undermining logical thinking. Kant referred to the inconsistency as the antinomy of pure reason. He argued that the antinomian conflict could not be resolved basing only on empirical knowledge. Instead, reason must espouse what Kant referred to as “the dogmatism of pure reason,” that is, it must presuppose either the thesis or the antithesis of the antinomian queries as given in absolute completeness and validity. As described by Kant in the section of the first *Critique* called “Transcendental Dialectic,” reason's dogmatism results in the transcendental ideas of God, freedom and immortality. The transcendental ideas are a mere assumption, an apodictic yet necessary motion of reason, meant for keeping its own integrity. They do not yield any knowledge about the

⁵⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 248.

⁶¹ Ibid, 3-4; see, Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, 248.

non-sensual world; instead, they are to retain the presumption that transcendental knowledge is valid. In Kant's argumentation, then, the transcendental illusion functions as a regulative principle without which “we should not possess a faculty of reason, nor without reason a consistent and self-accordant mode of employing the understanding, nor, in the absence of this, any proper and sufficient criterion of empirical truth.”⁶² Admittedly, not only does the transcendental illusion sanction reason as a reliable cognitive faculty, but it also grounds the soundness of metaphysics as a science by directing “the aims of the understanding beyond every given experience towards an extension as great as can possibly be attained.”⁶³ Human reason may be the “seat of illusion,”⁶⁴ but Kant argued that it was a useful illusion, dedicated particularly for metaphysics.

On the one hand, Kant argued that the transcendental illusion is unavoidable: “transcendental illusion [...] does not cease to exist, even after it has been exposed, and its nothingness clearly perceived by means of transcendental criticism. [...] This illusion is impossible to avoid, just as we cannot avoid perceiving that the sea appears to be higher at a distance than it is near the shore.”⁶⁵ On the other hand, Kant maintained that the transcendental illusion requires “rational faith,” understood as an *a priori* presupposition that the forms of reason do exist and are imposed on people as objective. He also claimed that rational faith was a postulate of pure reason, making it differed from the “leaf of faith,” constructed by David Hume (1711-1776), a Scottish philosopher and economist. The “leap of faith” is a gesture of skepticism caused by a lack of a well-founded proof for the existence of transcendental ideas, and then described as reason's self-regulating mechanism grounded in its power of self-reflection. The leap of faith denotes reason's dependence on metaphysics and spirituality. However, due to rational faith, reason could

62 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 443.

63 Ibid., 439; see Michelle Grier, “The Logic of Illusion and the Antimonies,” in Bird, *A Companion to Kant*, 204.

64 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 439.

65 Ibid., 247.

grant itself with a synthetic unity solely by its own means and, therefore, it could assume its independence from external influences.⁶⁶

The belief in rational self-causation, although based on the transcendental illusion, is central to what Kant referred to as “moral faith.” Although he did not support religious worship, especially in philosophical investigations, he did claim that metaphysics necessitated the acceptance of some Christianity tenets. The claim is evinced in his examination of reason's transcendental ideas. Unlike theistic thinkers, he opposed the view that morality should be derived solely from religious ethical doctrines. Traditional religious dogmas might be useful for moral conduct in the sense of delivering “nothing more than two articles of belief,”⁶⁷ i.e., the transcendental ideas of God, heaven, and immortal soul. However, none of them could ever yield any substantive knowledge as, in Kant's vision of pure ethics, religion is the effect of morality, not its cause or motivation.

Kant discussed the nature of moral faith in his two major works on ethics, the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), in which he employed the logic of transcendental illusion to explain the *a priori* grounds of moral concepts. The two works were followed by the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), a two-piece volume devoted to practical uses of ethical precepts, especially in juridical duties, moral education, and the cultivation of virtue. According to Kant, each of the works was to address one of the three tasks of moral philosophy: to establish “the supreme principle of morality,” to conduct a critical scrutiny of pure practical reason, and to identify a metaphysics of morals. Before engaging in proper investigations, however, Kant argued that the claims of morality were universal. Therefore, similarly to his critical theory, discussing the *a priori* conditions of cognition, his ethical philosophy employs the transcendental illusion in order to establish and secure the universal forms of pure

66 Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Further Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. Lewis White Beck (1783; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill), 6, 80.

67 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 550.

morality. Admittedly, reminiscent of rational faith, Kant's ethical thought constitutes no exception to the logic of transcendental illusion.⁶⁸

In his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant addressed the task of establishing the supreme principle of morality. Firstly, he concentrated on the concept of “a good will,” arguing that a good will was good not because of what it effected but because of its good volition. A good will is also unqualified, that is, its goodness cannot be derived from empirical factors, such as wealth, pleasure, or sensuous satisfaction, but solely from its own motivation. In Kant's view, a good will “is good only through its willing, i.e., it is good in itself,”⁶⁹ and a good will is always derived from respect for duty. A will that acts only in accordance with duty, which may happen when its motives only coincide with the precepts of the law, cannot be defined as good. A good will is thus a conscious and autonomous decision to observe the law. Moreover, since a good will is guided by reason, reason is also the origin of the duty espoused by one's good will. According to Kant's definition, duty is the “necessity of an action done out respect for the law,”⁷⁰ the law that a good will freely adopts as a universal principle of behavior, named by him the “categorical imperative,” and defined with the following precept: “I should never act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law.”⁷¹ By a “maxim” Kant meant a subjective principle of action imposed by reason onto one's will. A maxim could be identified with the categorical imperative if its guiding principle is both subjective and universally valid for anyone at all times. Kant enumerated five maxims that complied with the categorical imperative. The maxims are known in moral philosophy as the formulations of the categorical imperative. The formula of the universal law commands to act “only according to that maxim whereby you can at

68 Cf. Mary Gregor, “Introduction,” i.

69 Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington, (1785; Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 7.

70 Ibid., 13.

71 Ibid., 14.

the same time will that it should become a universal law.”⁷² The formula of the law of nature imposes the duty to act “as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.”⁷³ The formula of humanity as an end prompts to act “in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.”⁷⁴ The formula of autonomy is defined as “the idea of the will of every rational being as a will that legitimizes the universal law.”⁷⁵ The last formulation of the categorical imperative is called the formula of the kingdom of ends and it recommends to act “in accordance with the maxims of a member legislating universal laws for a merely possible kingdom of ends.”⁷⁶ Considered collectively, all the enumerated formulations of the categorical imperative confirm Kant's contention that a binding moral law reflects solely the form of the law itself, i.e., the universal law. The above-presented formulations also demonstrate that in Kantian ethics the moral value of an action is decided on the basis of the motives leading to the action, and not the action's consequences. Accordingly, since in Kant's view only free will can command morally approvable motives, the supreme principle of morality, i.e., the ultimate formulation of the categorical imperative, is the formula of autonomy.⁷⁷

Despite such a rigid theoretical framework, in the second section of the *Grounding*, entitled “Transition from Popular Philosophy to a Metaphysics of Morals,” Kant argued that “there are always doubts whether what occurs has really been done from duty and so has moral worth.”⁷⁸ Therefore, in order to identify and mitigate the doubt, Kant maintained that pure moral philosophy needed to employ the logic of transcendental illusion in its quest for the universally valid motives of moral conduct. Accordingly, the concepts which

⁷² Ibid., 30.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 7-8, 44.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 19.

specify morally approvable actions can be compared with the transcendental ideas of pure reason. Similarly to the transcendental ideas of pure reason, the concepts of morality have to be presupposed so as to be universally binding. The *a priori* presupposition, not derivative from empirical knowledge, constitutes the only manner in which moral concepts can be recognized as valid, thus leading to morally good action. It is in this sense that the logic of transcendental illusion legitimizes moral values. Consequently, while the doubt regarding the ethical quality of an act is inevitable, the transcendental illusion served Kant to uphold his claim that acts done from duty had universally valid character.⁷⁹

Kant's employment of the transcendental illusion is also evinced in his moral idealism. He considered his moral philosophy as connected with transcendental logic whose main objective was to investigate “the particular acts and rules of pure thinking, i.e., of thinking whereby objects are cognized completely *a priori*.”⁸⁰ Admittedly, looking for absolutely certain moral concepts, Kant concentrated his research on universal truths, which could be obtained *a priori*, and not through particular situations delivered in everyday experience. However, as he concluded in the *Grounding*, the study of valid truths causes numerous difficulties and is rarely rewarding, mainly because the object of the study exceeds empirical knowledge. Consequently, argued Kant, as the universal values of morality are not empirical, “we do not indeed grasp the practical unconditioned necessity of the moral imperative.”⁸¹ Instead, it is only possible to understand the imperative’s “inconceivability.”⁸² In order to comprehend the empirically incomprehensible, and to ascertain the reality of universally valid moral values, one can only have recourse to the transcendental illusion.

Kant perceived morality as a conundrum. On the one hand, it is present in the world of

79 Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, 285.

80 Kant, *Grounding*, 23.

81 Ibid., 62.

82 Ibid.

senses. On the other hand, in order to be valid, the underlying principles of morality should reside beyond empirical knowledge. Morality exceeds the capacities of ordinary sensibility; otherwise, it would not be binding in the sensibly knowable world. The role of the transcendental illusion is to mediate the conundrum and eradicate its contradictions. The other function of the transcendental illusion is to render the supreme principle of morality, a purely transcendental idea of freedom, as real in the world determined by laws of physics. The rendition is necessary because even when humans perceive themselves as obeying the moral law, they can never be certain that they are motivated by duty, and not by contingent inclinations, or that they merely act in accordance with the duty. Surely enough, the doubt of failing the demands of morality itself indicates people's access to the moral law. Without the access, there would be no reason for the doubt. Consequently, the doubt proves Kant's theory of the agent's autonomy and its independence of external factors. The proof is mediated by the logic of the transcendental illusion, understood as the *a priori* belief in the reality of the transcendental idea of freedom, the central concept of Kant's ethics, i.e., the categorical imperative.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argued that there was a separate faculty which required and established the transcendental illusion as genuinely possible, and called by him the faculty the “pure practical reason.” He claimed that the fact of morality, scrutinized in *Grounding*, necessarily testified to the reality of freedom. Without autonomous will, there would be no genuine respect for duty and, therefore, no morality. Yet, since morality is an empirical fact, freedom does exist, for freedom is morality's prerequisite condition. Accordingly, freedom is not a mere fantasy; on the contrary, it is a transcendental idea actualized by the reality of morality. Freedom can also be determined as “a necessary transcendental illusion”⁸³ to indicate the fact that its reality is not derived

83 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (1788; Hazelton: Pennsylvania State University Electronic Classic Series, 2010), 16.

from empirical knowledge but from metaphysical speculation. That makes freedom real not in the empirical but in the transcendental understanding of reality.⁸⁴

According to Kant, the reality of morality presupposes the two other transcendental ideas of pure reason; the ideas of God and immortality. Without the assumption that there is a supreme being which will reward one's moral efforts with actual happiness in the future, people would be condemned to moral despair. In Kant's view, moral action ought to result in one's happiness, which, however, rarely happens, hence there is a need of a transcendental warrant that the "worthiness of being happy"⁸⁵ would eventually coincide with actual happiness. Since such a warrant is not an object of empirical knowledge, the only way in which man can mitigate moral despair is to postulate the reality of the warrant. Inevitably, pure practical reason identifies the warrant with the ideas of God and immortality. However, since the postulates of pure practical reason do not belong to the world of phenomena, but to the world of noumena, the ideas of God and immortality need to follow the logic of transcendental illusion to be guaranteed as the real and valid warrants of happiness. In this sense, transcendental illusion constitutes a key notion of Kant's moral philosophy; it denotes the manner in which pure practical reason derives its transcendental ideas from the reality of morality.⁸⁶

Kant introduced to his ethical investigation the distinction between the world of phenomena and the world of noumena into his moral investigations because otherwise his arguments would be self-contradictory. On the one hand, morality entails freedom, on the other, however, people live in the world of senses predetermined by the laws of physics. In such a world, there seems to be no room for freedom and morality. Kant mitigated the inconsistency by claiming that people were transcendently free, exercising their free will

⁸⁴ Ibid., 16-18.

⁸⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 535.

⁸⁶ Graham Bird, "General Introduction," in *A Companion to Kant*, ed. Graham Bird (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 252-254.

only when perceiving themselves as members of the noumenal world not determined by physical laws. Therefore, although people occupy the world of appearances, devoid of free will, they can still regard themselves as transcendently autonomous agents morally responsible for their actions. In this regard, the world of things-in-themselves is more fundamental than the world of appearances, which means that the moral law, originating in the world of noumena, is applicable in the world of senses. Kant referred to the superiority of the noumenal world over the world of phenomena as “the primacy of pure practical reason.”⁸⁷ It has frequently been argued that the postulate of the primacy of pure practical reason is not only connected with Kant's account of God's existence, but it also points to his idea of the unity and teleology of reason as a whole. Admittedly, it is the primacy of pure practical reason that allows for Kant's primary objective in his first *Critique*: to “make room for belief”⁸⁸ in the world of appearances.

According to Kant, reason has recourse to the transcendental illusion in order to ground its formal unity and to prompt the acquisition of valid knowledge. Moreover, the transcendental illusion accounts for the reality of the ideas of God, immortality, and freedom, all of them indispensable in the derivation of moral concepts. Predominantly, the logic of the transcendental illusion underlies Kant's distinction between the world of things-in-themselves and the immediate world of empirical phenomena. That distinction was the key concept of his transcendental philosophy. His greatest achievement, mediated by the transcendental illusion, is nevertheless the postulate of autonomy as the supreme principle of morality. Humans are not only free to decide about their actions, but they are also free to stipulate the actual precepts of the moral law. In a literal sense, Kant determined that solely people as rational beings are the authors of the moral law, only themselves being responsible for its quality. Neither God, nor any other divine authority,

⁸⁷ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 123.

⁸⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 23; see Sebastian Gardner, “The Primacy of Practical Reason,” in Bird, *A Companion to Kant*, 259.

but a human being can ordain the moral law.⁸⁹

Kant's views seem to coincide in numerous important aspects with the environmentalist postulate of weak anthropocentric value. Both Kant and weak anthropocentrists argue that people are the origin of moral concepts. They also agree that people decide about the moral considerability of the objects of sense experience. While Kant explained how the anthropocentric value systems were possible, the proponents of weak anthropocentric value explain why the systems can successfully be applied to environmental ethics. Consequently, although Kant has seldom been employed in the quest for reliable eco-ethics, in light of the recent developments within both environmental philosophy and animal studies, he can be perceived as a valuable ground for genuine ethics of nature. It is the assumption of Kant's potential for environmental ethics that shall further the ongoing investigation into his critical theory.

2.3. Kant's Philosophy in Relation to the Contemporary Environmental Issues

In the Kantian paradigm, reverence for the law originates only in reason. It means that only rational beings can be moral for it is them who solely have the faculty enabling them to respect and follow the precepts of the law. In Kant's ethics, then, moral agency could not be ascribed to non-rational creatures, such as animals, because they cannot be considered as necessitating any direct moral respect. Only creatures capable of morality could be objects of moral concern. Since animals lack ethics, they are not worthy of moral action, and are considered by Kant to be things.⁹⁰

Accordingly, Kant argued that non-human beings were ethically irrelevant and that they could be used as means of achieving other goals. In "The Doctrine of Virtue," the

⁸⁹ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 164.

⁹⁰ Alexander Broadie and Elizabeth M. Pybus, "Kant's Treatment of Animals," *Philosophy* 49, no. 190 (October 1974): 377.

second part of *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), Kant claimed that man “can therefore have no duty to any beings other than men [and] if he thinks he has such duties, it is because of an *amphiboly* of the *concept of reflection*.”⁹¹ As he explained in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, amphiboly is a “substitution of an object of pure understanding for a phenomenon,”⁹² that is, it is the false assumption that beings which do not have the power of reason do have it. Since animals have no practical reason, the Kantian argument implies that they have neither autonomous will nor noumenal selves, hence they are morally negligible.⁹³

However, in his 1775-1780 lectures, published in English in 1924 under the title *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant mitigated his views about animality by claiming that “nature has analogies to human nature, and by doing our duty to animals in respect of manifestations which correspond to manifestations of human nature, we indirectly do our duty towards humanity.”⁹⁴ So, despite his speciesism, Kant recognized that people were morally obliged toward animals. The obligation is indirect because it derives from people's obligation to improve their humanity by humane treatment of other people and non-human beings. People are thus obliged to respect non-human nature not because of its value but solely for the sake of improving their own humanity. Accordingly, man has a duty “to raise himself from the crude state of his nature, from his animality, [...] more and more towards humanity.”⁹⁵ Kant elaborated on this issue in the following manner:

If a man shoots his dog because the animal is no longer capable of service, he does not fail in his duty to the dog, for the dog cannot judge, but his act is

91 Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (1797; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 237 (emphasis original).

92 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 321.

93 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 237-238. It must be noted, however, that Kant did not consider animals to be automata in the Cartesian sense, that is, that they were unconscious machines. He claimed that animals were sentient creatures which felt pleasure and pain, had interests, and could be benefited or maltreated by humans. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (1790; Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 52, 256, 356-375, 400.

94 Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. L. Infield (1775-1780; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 239-240.

95 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 191.

inhuman and damages in himself that humanity which is his duty to show towards mankind. If he is not to stifle his human feelings, he must practice kindness towards animals, for he who is cruel to animals becomes also hard in his treatment of men.⁹⁶

Although animals are non-rational, hence they do not directly necessitate any moral duties, people still improve their morality, and humanity in general, if they refrain from inhumane treatment of animals. Kant explained his view in the following way:

violent and cruel treatment of animals is far more intimately opposed to man's duty to himself [...] for it dulls his shared feeling of their pain and so weakens and gradually uproots a natural predisposition that is very serviceable to morality in one's relations with other men.⁹⁷

He argued that the way in which humans could execute their indirect duty to non-humans would be by treating animals as necessitating direct moral considerability. He claimed that even the “gratitude for the service of an old horse or a dog (as if they were members of the household) belongs indirectly to man's duty with regard to these animals.”⁹⁸ Accordingly, human treatment of animals is ethically relevant because anything people do, including their approach toward non-humans, is always subject to moral assessment and has an impact on their humanity.⁹⁹

Moreover, the duty to animals should be prescriptive, that is, not only should people avoid maltreating animals, but they also ought to be considerate and helpful to them. In one of his 1775-1780 lectures, Kant clarified the claim by writing that “[t]ender feelings towards dumb animals develop human feelings towards mankind.”¹⁰⁰ The quote seems particularly significant in the context of Kant's teachings about morally desirable attitudes and the corresponding importance of good will. People who respect animals exercise their good will; they learn how to be moral and how to preserve their morality. People who hurt

96 Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 240.

97 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 238.

98 Ibid.

99 See Alexander Broadie and Elizabeth M. Pybus, “Kant's Treatment of Animals,” 378.

100 Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 240.

animals, on the other hand, blunt their sensitivity to others, thus diminishing their morality. Consequently, those who respect animals implement some of the most important ethical requirements: the duty to strive for self-perfection in humanity, to constantly develop one's morality, and to respect one's own humanity. A continual effort to fulfill these obligations is what Kant referred to as virtue, that is, "the strength of human being's maxims in fulfilling his duty."¹⁰¹

Seen from the perspective of environmental philosophy, Kant's views can be defined as deontological, i.e., based on the assumption that moral value resides in the intention of an action, and not in its consequences. Kant's theory can also be stipulated as both anthropogenic, i.e., designating humans as the source of moral value, and weakly anthropocentric, especially in the understanding of Hargrove's weak anthropocentrism. It can be argued that, similarly to such twentieth-century eco-ethicists as Norton, Jamieson, Hargrove, Lee and, in certain aspects, Singer and Rolston III, Kant could also have opted for an extension of traditional ethics over the objects of nature. Unlike most twentieth-century environmentalists, however, Kant did not claim that the extension was demanded due to environmental concerns, or for the sake of natural entities, but rather for it being an imperative of general ethics, required for the sake of human self-perfection. People ought to respect non-human entities *because* it is a precept of the general moral law, incorporated into the formula of the categorical imperative, and not because of nature's moral considerability. Consequently, within the framework of environmental philosophy, Kant's ethics seems more advanced than that of a considerable number of twentieth- and twenty-first century anthropocentric eco-ethicists, at least with respect to the theoretical basis of man's duty to animals.

Kant argued that the extension of human ethics onto non-humans was mediated by the faculty of judgement, and based on the analogy between ethics and aesthetics. He clarified

101 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 197.

the idea in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), in which he endeavored to prove that the precepts of the moral law were realizable in the world of natural laws. Accordingly, he strived to bridge “the immense gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, the supersensible, so that the second [has] an influence on the first, i.e., the concept of freedom [can] actualize in the world of sense the purpose enjoined by its laws.”¹⁰² Kant's extension of general ethics over natural objects will henceforth be demonstrated by examining Kant's proof for the realizability of the moral law in the phenomenal realm of nature.

The focus of Kant's elucidation in the third *Critique* is the faculty of judgement. Whereas in the two previous *Critiques* he argued that judgement was used by reason to apply the *a priori* concepts of the understanding to the content supplied by sensibility, in the last *Critique* he further specified that there was a separate faculty of judgement setting *a priori* principles for aesthetic responses to art and nature. He distinguished two such responses: judgements of taste and judgements of the sublime. As for the judgements of taste, specifying whether something is beautiful, Kant distinguished their four characteristics. Firstly, judgements of taste induce pleasure or aversion to certain objects without people's being interested in the existence of these objects. Secondly, the pleasure or displeasure must be felt as universal, that is, to judge an object as beautiful or ugly is to presuppose that the object induces the same kind of aesthetic reaction in anyone who should ever encounter the object. To judge something as beautiful is to speak with a “universal voice,” although “there can be no rule by which someone could be compelled to acknowledge that something is beautiful.”¹⁰³ Thirdly, there are two kinds of beauty: free beauty, which does not presuppose its object and whether it is good for some purpose; and dependent beauty, relating to things useful for obtaining certain goals. Kant maintained

¹⁰² Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 14-15.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 59.

that the judgements of taste concerned only free beauty. The last characteristic is that “the beautiful is what without a concept is cognized as the object of a *necessary* liking,”¹⁰⁴ which means that Kant must have presupposed the existence of a shared aesthetic sense, otherwise, he would have had no grounds for claiming that people could agree with one another whether a given object evoked pleasure or aversion. However, people's shared aesthetic sense is not another cognitive faculty, but “the effect arising from the free play of [people's] cognitive powers,”¹⁰⁵ that is, it derives from a spontaneous interaction between imagination and the understanding. Kant explained the interaction as a state of “*free play* of the cognitive powers, accompanying a representation by which an object is given [and which] must be universally communicable; for cognition, the determination of the object with which given representations are to harmonize (in any subject whatever), is the only way of presenting that holds for everyone.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, in Kant's view, the source of pleasure in an object lies in the fact that the object provokes a free play between imagination and the understanding, and that the play happens in the same way for everyone.¹⁰⁷

As for the judgements of the sublime, similarly to the judgements of taste, they respond to the form of objects, not to their content, yet they result from completely different aesthetic responses to the perceived objects. Accordingly, while the latter stands for a harmony between the cognitive faculties, the former indicates their disharmony. The sublime, which involves limitlessness, can even originate in objects without form. However, sublimity is never entirely chaotic as it relates to a congruity of a different kind and at a different cognitive level than that of beauty. It occasions a co-operation between imagination and reason. To account for the cooperation, Kant differentiated between two

104 Ibid., 90 (emphasis original).

105 Ibid., 87.

106 Ibid., 62 (emphasis original).

107 Paul Guyer, “Bridging the Gulf: Kant's Project in the Third *Critique*,” in Bird, *A Companion to Kant*, 427.

types of the sublime: the mathematically sublime and the dynamically sublime. The mathematically sublime induces pleasure at the realization that theoretical reason can encompass vistas too vast for imagination by formulating the idea of infinity. Accordingly, the mathematically sublime sets the mind at peace, whereas the dynamically sublime moves the mind as it is related to the harmony between imagination and practical reason. The dynamically sublime is caused by overwhelmingly powerful objects, such as thunderclouds, volcanoes, and hurricanes, and other phenomena capable of seriously harming and even killing human and non-human beings. As Kant argued, impressive and, at the same time, threatening things “raise the soul's fortitude above its usual middle range and [...] give us the courage to believe that we could be a match for nature's seeming omnipotence.”¹⁰⁸ Faced with the might of nature, people learn to distance themselves from earthly concerns by regarding “as small all the objects of our natural concerns: property, health, and life.”¹⁰⁹ Reason, through the feeling of the sublime, recognizes *its own* sublimity in the face of nature and life-threatening phenomena.¹¹⁰

Kant links morals and nature by drawing an analogy between the above-discussed aesthetic judgements of taste and the sublime as well as the ethical judgement. First, beauty is the symbol of morality, and the beauty of human figure can be perceived as “[the] visible expression of moral ideas that govern men inwardly.”¹¹¹ Second, Kant treats the feeling of sublimity as an analogue to human morality. According to his aesthetic theory, the pleasure that people take in the dynamically sublime is very similar to the pleasure that they feel when reason manages to adopt the moral law and, subsequently, they abide by its precepts despite all the accompanying threats and dangers. Third, in some cases the beautiful can be better suited to represent certain aspects of human morals than

¹⁰⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 120.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 121.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 97-114.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 84.

the sublime. Kant's claim is based on the presupposition that beauty and morality cannot be predetermined for they both imply the idea of transcendental freedom. Both moral judgement, originating in the autonomy of the will, and the judgement of taste, based on a spontaneous free play of the cognitive faculties, entail freedom of the cognitive powers from any determinant concepts. The beautiful can thus be perceived as the symbol of the morally good because they both induce similar functioning of the cognitive apparatus. The fourth analogy involves the parallel between the general "intellectual interest in the beautiful"¹¹² and the fact that reason is interested in ideas of objective reality. In Kant's view, nature's hospitality to people's moral objectives is in the interest of practical reason, and the experience of natural beauty is a symptom of such a hospitality. Clearly, the reason why people take delight in natural beauty is because it makes them realize that their moral ideals are objectively possible. Fifth, as maintained in the third *Critique*, the "beautiful prepares us for loving something, even nature, without interest; the sublime for esteeming it even against our interest (of sense)."¹¹³ Thus being able to love without any personal interest and to esteem contrary to one's own interest are the necessary preconditions of a proper moral conduct. Kant made a similar claim in *The Metaphysics of Morals*:

a propensity to wanton destruction of what is *beautiful* in inanimate nature is opposed to man's duty to himself; for it weakens or uproots that feeling in [us] which, though not of itself moral, is still a disposition of sensibility that greatly promotes morality or at least prepares the way for it: the disposition, namely, to love something (e.g. beautiful crystal formations, the indescribable beauty of plants) even apart from any intention to use it.¹¹⁴

In Kant's view, the aesthetic feeling of attraction toward the beauty of nature, similarly to the feelings of sympathy and benevolence, is not only consistent with the moral law, but it can also function as a way of implementing its precepts. Finally, according to Kant, the

112 Ibid., 165.

113 Ibid., 127.

114 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 237 (emphasis original).

promotion of the aesthetic taste can lead to enhancing the quality of politics, civil ethics, and a reciprocal communication between people of different education, social status, and cultural sophistication, thus preserving mutual co-operation within societies.¹¹⁵

Paul Guyer, one of the best-acclaimed scholars of Immanuel Kant, has stressed that the above-enumerated six links enabled Kant to relate the abstract requirements of ethics to the sensuous experience of beauty and sublimity. Guyer reformulated them into four comprehensive points. Firstly, moral ideas are present in the palpably beautiful objects of nature as well as in art. Secondly, the experience of the dynamically sublime confirms the assumption that people are free and that their will is autonomous of any external inclinations. Thirdly, that people are interested in the beautiful testifies to the fact that human moral objectives are natural and achievable. Lastly, people share various aesthetic feelings and experiences, which can also be seen as contributing to the realization of morality on a universal scale.¹¹⁶

The second part of the third *Critique*, called “Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgement,” defines people as the ultimate end of nature because only they possess the unconditional moral value of freedom, and can work to improve their moral character. A will to improve one's morality was called by Kant “virtue,” defined as “worthiness to be happy”¹¹⁷ resulting from the strength of character in following the precepts of the moral law. As already noted, virtue can be cultivated by treating non-rational beings as deserving moral respect. Also, as a purposeful mechanism, nature can stimulate virtue by delivering “the culture of discipline [which] consists in the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires.”¹¹⁸ Accordingly, since Kant based morality on autonomy, it can be argued that nature delivers means of cultivating one's moral sensitivity. It is in this sense that Kant

115 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 230-232; see Guyer, “Bridging the Gulf,” 432.

116 Guyer, “Bridging the Gulf,” 432.

117 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 339; cf. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 113.

118 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 319.

thought nature to be amenable to human ethics. However, it is a mistake to perceive nature as a source virtue itself because neither virtue nor morality can ever be subject to natural determinism. Instead, nature can only encourage a quest for virtue and moral perfection.¹¹⁹

The ultimate argument of the “Critique of Teleological Power of Judgement” is that reason presupposes nature as a purposefully organized whole in order to retain the synthetic unity of empirical knowledge. The vision of nature as a systematic mechanism is thus only regulative, not constitutive, i.e., it does not yield any substantiative truths about nature in general. It is only to enable the pursuit of empirical research. Admittedly, the speculative appeal to nature's systematic completeness follows the logic of transcendental illusion. Since the validity of science can be guaranteed solely on the basis of nature's thorough integrity, not on contingent experience, it is necessary to exceed empirical knowledge and transcendently presuppose the unity of nature. What allows to conceive of nature as inherently uniform is the experience of organisms as indispensable parts of their environments and of the environments as holistic structures with which the activities of individual organisms remain coordinated. Accordingly, Kant ascertained nature's systematic completeness by acknowledging its internal purposefulness. He argued that the ultimate goal of nature was the human being, understood as a noumenon, i.e., possessing the faculty of transcendental freedom. In this sense, Kant posited morality as the ultimate end of nature.¹²⁰

The purposefulness of organisms led Kant to regard God as the prime architect of the world. Therefore, nature ascertains both the transcendental idea of freedom and the transcendental idea of a supreme being. The logic of transcendental illusion as a way of rendering the idea of reason real inevitably complies with the apparent purposefulness of nature. Consequently, not only does nature presuppose morality, but also morality assumes

119 Ibid., 322-323; cf. Guyer, “Bridging the Gulf,” 433-435.

120 Bird, “General Introduction,” 405-407.

nature as the space where its ultimate goal, the human being, resides. Due to such a congruence, Kantian ethics seems to contribute to the eco-ethical theory of weak anthropocentric value.

2.4. Philosophy and Animal Ethics

Despite extensive proof for the moral considerability of animals, there has been a steady increase in an abusive exploitation of animals, especially by those whose profits depend on animal products. James Rachels (1941-2003), an American philosopher specializing in ethics and animal rights, referred to the issue in the following manner:

We kill animals for food; we use them as experimental subjects in laboratories; we exploit them as sources of raw materials such as leather and wool; we keep them as work animals. These practices are to our advantage; and we intend to continue them. Thus when we think about what animals are like we are motivated to conceive them in ways that are compatible with treating them in these ways. If animals are conceived as intelligent, sensitive beings, these ways of treating them might seem monstrous. So humans have reasons to resist thinking of them as intelligent and sensitive.¹²¹

According to Rachels, people have specific reasons for disregarding arguments for animal ethics, and a number of the reasons have a clearly speciesist overtone. People seem reluctant to limit the exploitation of animals because of the material benefits gained from utilizing animal products. Therefore, although occasionally successful, the proponents of animal rights rarely gather enough support to introduce laws eradicating or substantially limiting animal exploitation. In profit-oriented economy, animal abuse continues because of its financial viability, despite being discouraged by scientific research and ethical considerations.

Cora Diamond (b. 1937), an American philosopher from the University of Virginia,

¹²¹ James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implication of Darwinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 129.

argues in her 1978 study “Eating Meat and Eating People” that the reason for the little effectiveness of ecological activists is because they resort mainly to rationality, rarely recognizing the importance of such factors as preference, sentiment and custom. She discusses the failures of the Singer-Regan type of justification for vegetarianism. According to Singer and Regan, discussed in Chapter I, animals are morally considerable because, similarly to people, they have interests deducible from philosophical disquisition and from research in animal sentience. In Diamond's view, Singer and Regan are wrong to equate the reasons for animal ethics with the reasons for human ethics. As she proves in her study, they ignore the fact that people may resign from meat for emotional reasons, beliefs, and moral values, without necessarily explaining the abstinence with rationally-proven grounds. As an illustration, she provides the example of pets; they are not eaten because people treat them as “fellow beings,”¹²² rather than because of their rights, inherent value, or interests. As fellow beings, pets are *a priori* tabooed as uneatable, without any further need of rational justification. Therefore, the reason for not eating pets is how they are *perceived*, not how they are rationalized by science or philosophy. Respect for animals is subject to contemplation rather than to observation.

Diamond points to the limitedness of the Singer-Regan argumentation by exposing its following inconsistency: “there is absolutely nothing queer, nothing at all odd, in the vegetarian eating the cow that has obligingly been struck by lightning.”¹²³ As she maintains, Singer and Regan are wrong because they justify the refusal to eat meat with categories that apply solely to living beings, that is, sentience and the value of life. In the ensuing quote, Diamond exposes their mistake at its starkest:

But if the point of the Singer-Regan vegetarian's argument is to show that the eating of meat is, morally, in the same position as the eating of human flesh, he is not consistent unless he says that it is just squeamishness, or something like that,

¹²² Cora Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People,” *Philosophy* 53, no. 206 (October 1978): 469-470.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 468.

which stops us from eating our dead. If he admitted that what underlies our attitude to dining on ourselves is the view that *a person is not something to eat*, he could not focus on the cow's right not to be killed or maltreated, as if that were the heart of it.¹²⁴

Specifically, Diamond claims that “there is nothing in the [Singer-Regan] discussion which suggests that a cow is *not* something to eat.”¹²⁵ An animal is considered unsuitable for eating because of the idea people have with reference to the animal, not because of the animal itself. Accordingly, to limit meat consumption, people should abandon their view of animals as a source of food.

Diamond stresses that “fellow being” is not a biological term; it is a way of perceiving animals. The term has two inflections: active and passive. The active understanding of “fellow beings” is reminiscent of Kant; it designates animals as morally important, thus always requiring respect. The passive understanding follows Derrida's idea of *l'animot*. In Diamond's opinion, “animals are not given for our thought independently of [all the] mass of ways of thinking about and responding to them,”¹²⁶ but they are predefined by culturally constructed concepts of animality. How one reacts to animals derives from the existing conceptualizations of animality. According to Diamond, both carnivorousness and vegetarianism are based on such conceptualizations. People choose whether to eat meat or not basing on the idea of animals they have; if they treat animals as resources, they will kill and eat them, but they will refrain from meat as long as they think of animals as fellow beings. Clearly, the notion of “fellow beings” refers to attitudes to animals, rather than animals in themselves.

Diamond's theory shows parallels to Kant's transcendentalism. Both are independent of empirical experience and they cannot be deduced basing solely on philosophical reflection. They depend on one's sense of morality. From this perspective, vegetarianism is

124 Ibid. (emphasis original).

125 Ibid. (emphasis original).

126 Ibid., 476.

specific only to humans; only people can have the concept of a fellow being and act accordingly out of a conscious desire to be moral. Diamond uses the argument to question the Singer-Regan claim that all people should become vegetarians because, similarly to humans, animals have the right not to feel pain. In the view of Singer and Regan, vegetarianism is based on an external necessity; they present it as a requirement of the law. Drawing upon Kant, Diamond designates vegetarianism as an imperative dictated by one's internal sense of morality. Vegetarianism cannot be imposed; on the contrary, it ought to derive from one's genuine respect for other beings.

In her 2003 paper, "The Difficulty of Philosophy and the Difficulty of Reality," Diamond maintains that, in addition to being insufficient, rational argumentation might hinder insight into certain phenomena, among them animal interactions with the world. Human language also constitutes such an impediment. According to Diamond, while improving the exchange of information, verbal language might impair communication in situations when the conveyed meanings exceed human concepts. In her analysis, she refers to Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of language games, according to which the meaning of a word, or even of an entire sentence, depends on the context in which it is used. In Wittgenstein's view, interlocutors speaking the same language might misunderstand each other if they come from different contexts. Accordingly, when Wittgenstein argued, "[if] I were to talk to myself out loud in a language not understood by those present my thoughts would be hidden from them,"¹²⁷ he did not mean any foreign language, a vernacular, but he rather referred to a language game unfamiliar to his hypothetical listeners. The point is illustrated by Wittgenstein's following remark:

It is, however, important as regards this observation that one human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the

¹²⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (1953; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 222.

country's language. We do not *understand* the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.)¹²⁸

The reasons for an ineffective communication between people made Wittgenstein recognize the difficulties of interspecies communication. Toward the end of his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), he remarked that if “a lion could talk, we could not understand him.”¹²⁹ Should animals be capable of human speech, people would probably never understand them, not because of an incorrect use of language, but rather because people and animals would have different meanings for the same words and phrases. For Wittgenstein, communication depends on the situation, hindering successful communication even within the same language.

Diamond employs Wittgenstein's observations to claim that the Western preference for specifically verbal languages is limiting in contacts between people and animals. Logocentrism characterizes solely human language games, therefore, it is ignorant of meanings exceeding human communication. To disregard the non-rational and, predominantly, non-human ways of interacting with the world is to enter yet another language game: human speciesism. Consequently, argues Diamond, man's persistence with the language games of rational argumentation, evident particularly in philosophical discourse, testifies not only to people's speciesism but also to their perceptive limitedness.

In her *Animal Happiness* (1994), Vicki Hearne's (1941-2001), an American author and philosopher, complies with Diamond's criticism of logocentrism, although her argument is based on a disapproval of Wittgenstein's doubt about interspecies communication. Experienced in animal training, she argues that Wittgenstein's statement about the lion had been “the most interesting mistake about animals that [she had] ever come across [because] lions do talk to some people and are understood.”¹³⁰ Hearne argues that “the

128 Ibid., 223 (emphasis original).

129 Ibid.

130 Vicki Hearne, *Animal Happiness* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 167.

lovely thing about Wittgenstein's lions is that Wittgenstein does not leap to say that his lion is languageless, only that he [the lion] is not talking,"¹³¹ thus implying that animal silence is a kind of passive defiance against human domination. For Hearne, Wittgenstein's lion is not speechless; on the contrary, it expresses itself through silence, thus avoiding mis-conceptualization through human language. In a sense, by resisting human domination, the lion becomes an agent; it gains subjectivity, although people are frequently unaware of it. Hearne refers to the silent presence of animals as "consciousness that is beyond ours."¹³² In his comment on Hearne's ideas, Cary Wolfe (b. 1959), a scholar of Rice University, Houston, Texas, recognizes that "this darkness or muteness of the animal other is shown [by Hearne] to be more a problem for *us* than for the animal."¹³³ Cora Diamond refers to the silent presence of animals as "the difficulty of reality," that is, the difficulty of providing logical explanation for the phenomena that exceed rationalistic disquisition. Animals pose such a difficulty because they reside beyond the range of human perception.

Hearne does not claim that communication with animals is always foreclosed for humans. She argues that training is one of the situations when people and animals manage to communicate with each other. In her view, the trainer has to understand the animal to make it listen; on the other hand, the animal must also learn to understand the trainer's commands to perform well. For Hearne, training allows animals to speak in their own voice and, in a sense, realize themselves. Thomas Nagel, author of one of the most significant contributions concerning intraspecies epistemology, entitled "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" (1974), would disagree with Hearne's claim that her vision of man-animal communication is incomplete because it presents only a human understanding of communication. Animals communicate in ways unknown to people; they use non-verbal

131 Ibid., 196.

132 Ibid., 196.

133 Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 45 (emphasis original).

means of exchanging information, processing the information differently to people. Silence may mean something different to animals than it does to humans. Therefore, when Hearne claims to communicate with animals, she is in fact misconceiving animality by imposing her vision of communication on them. The meaning of animal silence is denied to men; as Nagel argues, people can only know what it is like for them to have an animal perspective, but they will never know what it is like for an actual animal to be an animal.

Diamond is not as categorical as Nagel about the man-animal incompatibility. In her view, the difficulty of reality refers to “experiences in which we take something in reality to be resistant to our thinking it, or possibly to be painful in its inexplicability,”¹³⁴ engendering in turn “the difficulty of philosophy,”¹³⁵ i.e., the difficulty of providing logical explanation for such experiences. She discusses the example of the Holocaust; in her opinion, it is almost impossible to explain the crimes of the Second World War, to understand why certain people accepted them, or why others refused to counteract them. The Holocaust resists an explanation based on the principles of logic. However, people mostly know what the Holocaust was, so they sympathize with its victims and condemn its proponents. For Diamond, such non-rational understanding proves that people are capable of cognition far exceeding rational thinking and logical disquisition. Such paralogical modes of thinking are intuition, emotion, sympathy, and aesthetic sensibility. Since some of the modes are shared with animals, Diamond argues that a successful man-animal understanding is possible.

Singer and Regan, and a number of their followers, have tried to provide logical grounds for animal ethics, yet it appears that respect for animals, vegetarianism, or even animal rights are discretionary. People rarely decide to adopt animal-ethics basing on a thoughtful investigation into the available evidence; rather, they act on their preferences,

134 Cora Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” in *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 47.

135 Ibid., 69.

sensitivity, and emotions. In the following passage, Diamond maintains that the requirement for scientific evidence may prove harmful to the animal ethics discourse:

The mistake is to think that the callousness cannot be condemned without reasons which are reasons for anyone, no matter how devoid of all human imagination or sympathy. Hence [the] emphasis on rights, on capacities, on interests, on the biologically given; hence the distortion of [the] arguments.¹³⁶

According to Diamond, if vegetarianism is to be an ethical approach, it cannot be based on external influences, such as science, legislation, or custom, but it should develop out of the need to be ethical. Respect for animals, expressed through meat absenteeism, is a question of one's own principles, not a precept of the law, nor can it derive from any other external coercion. Since Kant defined ethics as a matter of moral sensibility, it could be argued that Diamond's approach to vegetarianism is based on Kantian ethics. Although she does not state it directly, it could be argued that without Kantian humanism the idea of animal rights loses its ethical aspect, becoming solely an object of techno-scientific rationalism sanctioned with administrative regulations.

Conclusion

A successful eco-ethics should recognize both rational and non-rational beings as subjects of moral consideration. It could be argued that Kant's theory of ethics and aesthetics, despite its numerous drawbacks, can serve as a source of a stable and well-founded animal ethics because it both recognizes humanity as the basis of ethics and extends people's moral duties from humans on to non-human beings. Accordingly, Kantian eco-ethics would feature an extension of human value systems onto the non-human part of nature. However, although Kant's thought can be seen as promising for a successful environmental

¹³⁶ Diamond, "Eating Meat and Eating People," 479.

ethics, it still needs to be approached with consideration and favorable attitude, but not without criticism.

The eco-discourse has already recognized the possibilities of Kant's philosophy, especially with regard to animal eco-ethics. In "Kant's Treatment of Animals" (1974) Alexander Broadie (b. 1942), a University of Edinburgh scholar, and Elizabeth M. Pybus (1880-1964), a Canadian philosopher from Cambridge University, argue that in Kant's view people are indirectly obliged not to maltreat animals. They claim that Kant opposed harassing animals because cruelty to living creatures leads people to treat their own rationality as a mere means to some contingent goals.¹³⁷ Dan Egonsson (b. 1956), a moral philosopher of Lund University, Sweden, claims in his "Kant's Vegetarianism" (1997) that Kant's indirect duty not to maltreat animals can be extended to support the vegetarian objection against killing animals for food. Egonsson stresses that according to Kant cruelty to animals desensitizes to suffering, and thus it damages human moral sensitivity. Since a person who eats meat is accepting cruelty to animals, Kant would oppose meat-eating as it might diminish the person's humanity. Egonsson claims that Kant would postulate non-meat diet as an indirect duty.¹³⁸ Christine M. Korsgaard (b. 1952), a Harvard University scholar, grounds her views about duties on the Kantian theory of ends-in-themselves. She claims that every organism, both human and non-human, matters to itself, therefore it is equipped with some good. Accordingly, if an entity contains a good, it means that it regards itself as an end, which in Kantian ethics presupposes the entity's moral considerability.¹³⁹ Allen W. Wood (b.1942), an American professor of philosophy from Indiana University, refers to Kant's teleology of nature. In his view, Kant's vision of nature as a purposeful system of reciprocally interacting organisms can be equated with the

137 Broadie and Pybus, "Kant's Treatment of Animals," 378-380.

138 Dan Egonsson, "Kant's Vegetarianism," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 31 (1997): 480-482.

139 Christine M. Korsgaard, "Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals," vol. 24 of *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, ed. Grethe B. Peterson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 79, https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/3198692/korsgaard_FellowCreatures.pdf?sequence=2.

concept of “ecosystem”; it can be morally valued as enabling not only rational but also non-rational life.¹⁴⁰ Onora O'Neill (b. 1941), an Irish philosopher from Oxford University, questions Kant's supposed thoroughgoing speciesism by proving that he did not view animals as mere items for human instrumental use, and allowed for indirect duties with regard to animals. Although the duties do not ascertain rights to animals, O'Neill argues that they still imply animal welfare, which could mean that Kant promoted duties to “dispersed aspects of nature,”¹⁴¹ such as biodiversity, landscapes, and species. Jens Timmermann (b. 1970), a Kantian philosopher of the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, extends Kant's ethics by ascribing value based on the duty to the self. In Timmermann's view, maltreatment of animals involves a contradiction: if a person's capacities were reduced to that of an animal, the person would make provisions against being badly treated. Consequently, if the person persists in maltreating actual animals, the person's behavior is inconsistent. Self-respect, in Timmermann's view, should eventually involve respect for the other.¹⁴²

While all of the enumerated Kantian scholars concentrate solely on Kant's ethics, especially on his theories of duty and value, none of them refers to the logic of transcendental illusion. In light of the recent developments in environmental philosophy, the Kantian standard theory of morality seems little effective, at least with regard to the ethics of animality. Not only did Kant deny moral considerability to non-humans, but he also postulated man as the ultimate end of all nature, implying that the non-human world is serviceable to human needs. Moreover, his aesthetic theory, otherwise promising with regard to the value of non-human nature, is based on numerous misconceptions. One of them questions Kant's assumption that the free play between the understanding and

140 Allan Wood, “Kant on Duties Regarding Nonrational Nature,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: Supplement* 72 (1998): 205.

141 Onora O'Neill, “Kant on Duties Regarding Nonrational Nature,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: Supplement* 72 (1998): 211.

142 Jens Timmermann, “When the Tail Wags the Dog: Animal Welfare and Indirect Duty in Kantian Ethics,” *Kantian Review* 10 (2005): 140.

imagination happens in the same way for everyone as lacking sufficient proof. He did not explain his claim that all pleasures, whether induced by beauty, goodness or the sublime, felt the same, even though they were generated in different ways. Significantly, his presupposition about the purposefulness of nature was discredited by the Darwinian theory of natural selection. There have been numerous organisms and even entire species useless or clearly harmful to their ecosystems. Natural selection has proved various species to be blind ends on the genealogical tree of nature. Moreover, the science of DNA eradicates the Kantian call for God as the warrant of unity and the completeness of the natural world.¹⁴³

Taking into consideration the theory of weak anthropocentric value, it seems that the Kantian theory of transcendental illusion is more promising for eco-ethics than his standard ethics of duty and value. John Maxwell Coetzee seems to espouse the logic of transcendental illusion in his search for a reliable ethics of animality. The ensuing chapters shall investigate the extent and success of Coetzee's employment of the Kantian logic of transcendental illusion in his chosen works.

143 Paul Guyer, "Kant's Ambitions in the Third *Critique*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 566-567, 576.

Chapter III

John Maxwell Coetzee's Critique of Western Rationalism: A Dialectical Perspective

The tenet of Kant's *Critique* is that knowledge cannot be gained solely through rational reflection. In order to be valid, claimed Kant, logical operations must be confirmed in empirical experience. Criticizing rationalism for ignoring the empirical part of cognition, Kant emphasized the role of sensual input, imagination and aesthetic sensitivity in both verifying and realizing reason's maxims of morality. However, many of Kant's ideas were undermined by the nineteenth-century discoveries in psychology, aesthetics, and natural and social sciences. His notion of natural teleology was proven wrong by Darwin's theory of evolution. Kant has also been frequently criticized for his rigid formalism, especially in his epistemological claims. Despite the criticism, however, Kant's notion of human subjectivity, his emphasis on people's responsibility for developing their morality have been successfully continued by numerous twentieth- and twenty-first-century thinkers, among them Emanuel Lévinas, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida. It is also John Maxwell Coetzee (b. 1941), a South African novelist and literary critic, who seems to emulate elements of Kant's critique in his investigation into the ethical status of animals. Coetzee recognizes rationalism, especially the method of philosophical enquiry involving thought-experiments, as a major impediment to an effective insight into non-human beings, therefore, as an obstacle to a successful ethics of animality. He considers literature to be a noteworthy and valuable means of stimulating people's sympathy for animals and

inducing their eco-conscious attitudes. The aim of the ensuing analysis is to identify Kantian references in Coetzee's literary work. The chapter will analyze Coetzee's scrutiny of Western rationalism, concentrating mainly on his critique of thought-experiments, as used for developing and securing philosophical claims about the ethical status of animals. Coetzee's critique of rationalism will be supplemented by the socio-psychological and Far East perspectives on formal logic.

3.1. Coetzee's Critique of Thought-Experiments

Coetzee follows the Kantian critique of rationalism by exposing reason's limited capability to account for the moral awakening of those protagonists of his novels who realize that their social privilege originates in elaborate systems of exploitation and prejudice which designate certain groups of people as inferior and less worthy of public recognition. Initially, the protagonists explain their privileges with ideologies favoring their social group, yet personally disturbed by the injustice, they soon begin to question the rationale underlying the inequality. Although the process is usually troublesome and not always complete, a number of Coetzee's protagonists manage to overcome their limitations and develop modes of thinking which enable them to recognize and counteract the witnessed wrong. Coetzee designates the modes as non-rational, claiming that they originate in emotions, rather than in rational reflection.

Coetzee exposes techno-scientific rationality of his protagonists and then he criticizes it for impairing moral sensitivity not only to humans but also to animals. Coetzee's efforts were recognized in 2003 when the Swedish Academy awarded him the Nobel Prize for literature. In the justification of their decision, the Academy praised the novelist as a "post-philosophical [...] doubter ruthless in his critique of the cruel rationalism of cosmetic

morality of the western civilization.”¹ Coetzee is acknowledged for pinpointing in his novels the moments when people's self-serving rationalizations collapse and can no longer be used to justify their “moral absenteeism.” Accordingly, in his critique of reason, Coetzee draws upon Kantian ideas not only because he exposes reason's limitations, but also because he address the grounds of morality.

Coetzee's main charge against the exaggerated rationalism and superficial morality of the West can be identified in his analysis of thought-experiments, understood as strictly logical methods of philosophical enquiry which limit non-rational forms of insight, among them emotions and situational factors, for reasons of formal clarity. Due to their disregard for external influences, thought-experiments tend to simplify the researched questions, frequently belying their complexity. Concepts which derive from thought-experiments are thus reminiscent of Kantian “empty words,” that is, ideas lacking viable empirical confirmation, such as the notions of a unicorn or phenix. Accordingly, not only does Coetzee invoke the Kantian praise for empiricism, but he also condemns rationalism for eradicating the paralogical modes of cognition, specifically imagination and empathy.²

Coetzee directly criticizes rationalism in *The Lives of Animals*, his 1999 novella, composed of two chapters, “The Philosophers and the Animals” and “The Poets and the Animals,” which are adopted versions of the speeches delivered by Coetzee at Princeton during the 1997 Tanner Lectures on Human Values, a series of prestigious inter-university discussions in the humanities. In the novella, Coetzee introduces a character named Elizabeth Costello, an aging Australian novelist of worldwide acclaim, who challenges Thomas Nagel (b. 1937), an American philosopher of mind. Nagel in his prominent 1979 article “What Is It Like to Be a Bat” claims that people cannot access the mental states of

1 “The Nobel Prize in Literature 2003 to John Maxwell Coetzee,” Nobel Media AB, accessed September 24, 2016, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2003/.

2 Stephen Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal: J. M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 23; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (1781; Hazleton: Pennsylvania State University Electronic Classic Series, 2010), 64, 224.

other beings, especially animals, because of the subjective nature of consciousness and experience. Nagel formulates his thesis in the following way:

It will not help to try to imagine that one has webbing on one's arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in one's mouth; that one has very poor vision, and perceives the surrounding world by a system of reflected high-frequency sound signals; and that one spends the day hanging upside down by one's feet in an attic. In so far as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for me to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task.³

According to Costello, Nagel's argument is “tragically limited,”⁴ not only because he deems reason incapable of comprehending animal modes of being, but also because he designates reason as people’s only cognitive faculty. In Nagel's view, bats are non-rational, their cognitive apparatus radically differs from the human one, therefore, bats represent “a fundamentally *alien* form of life,”⁵ meaning that man has no access to their experiences. Due to the differences, claims Nagel, human understanding of bats, and any other non-rational being, is significantly limited, if not impossible.

Costello accuses Nagel of selectivity. She argues that in his reasoning, he only takes into consideration the “sense-modalities of a bat,”⁶ the part of its being which differentiates it from humans, disregarding the factors common to bats and people, especially the fact of having a body. In reply to Nagel's skepticism, Costello argues for approaching bats, and any other animals, “literally,” that is, by taking into consideration the whole of their being, including not only their cognitive skills, but also their embodiment and the context in which they appear. Stephen Mulhall (b. 1962), an Oxford University philosopher, in his 2008 study of Coetzee, entitled *The Wounded Animal*

3 Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” in *Mortal Questions* (1974; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 169.

4 John Maxwell Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 31.

5 Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” 168 (emphasis original).

6 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 33.

(2008), argues that Costello's plea for literalness should not be confused with an urge to transubstantiate into an actual animal; it should rather be regarded as an attempt at genuine representation of animals:

Costello's use of the phrase is in fact imaginative, even ironic: she takes it that anyone who takes up the word "bat" has a responsibility thereby [...] to use it in ways that really are responsive to the reality of the creature to which it refers, and hence she is obliged to exercise the imagination necessary to apprehend that reality.⁷

While conceding that an undisturbed insight into an animal perspective can never be achieved, Costello argues that such an introspection should be imagined by way of sympathy. The approach is more effective because sympathy, unlike rationalistic thought-experiments, means individual treatment, without subsuming the animal under generic categories, as described by Derrida in his 1997 paper "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)." By urging to approach animals in a literal way, Costello designates imagination as supplementing the reductivism of rationalistic disquisition.

Norma, Costello's daughter-in-law, seems to interpret the urge to literalness in the zoological way, applying it to real animals, rather than to their imagined representations. Since Norma claims that it is impossible to transpose oneself into an actual animal, she interprets her mother-in-law's urge as absurd. According to Mulhall, the cause of the misunderstanding is Norma's profession. She is a philosopher of mind, although currently with no scholarly position, and she knows that thought-experiments constitute one of the basic research methods in philosophical analysis, and that they reduce the contextual influences of the analyzed issue to avoid disturbing the enquiry with dispensable details. For the sake of clarity, thought-experimenters concentrate on a selected aspect of the reality, taking into consideration only relevant data. The limited scope of thought-experiments is their constitutive characteristic intended to yield specific results.

⁷ Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal*, 35.

Accordingly, from Norma's perspective, "the actual reality of bat-life is of precisely no relevance to Nagel's bat."⁸ Context is relevant in questions referring to ethics. However, Nagel is not an ethicist. Therefore, for a philosopher of mind like Norma, Costello's plea to consider the context of thought-experiments appears misguided.⁹

Costello's urge "to stop with the bat"¹⁰ might appear identical with the reductive approach of analytical philosophy. However, arguing for a "literal cast of mind,"¹¹ she does not mean to case-study any real-life bats; rather, she would advocate imagining the bat's reality, i.e., the conditions in which bats live, and their most likely environments. She encourages to consider bats not in separation from but in relation to their life circumstances. Otherwise, the idea of batness would be incomplete and false. Consequently, in Costello's understanding, literalness involves imagination and a regard for the immediate reality of the analyzed issue as well as its associated contexts and meanings. It could thus be claimed that imagination as designated by Coetzee overcomes the reductiveness of *l'animot* by surpassing a culturally projected vision of animals, and then approaching them on their own right, that is, as individual entities.

The importance of the context is also central to Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of language games. Mulhall claims that Norma, concentrating solely on the analyzed subject matter, reduces interference, thus allowing for a more efficient insight and, eventually, more accurate judgement. However, such a worldview denies the Wittgensteinian claim that the meaning of a given concept, phrase, and a gesture is determined by the circumstances, or the language game, in which people communicate with each other. To understand the communication, and to pass an accurate judgement, it is necessary to account for the language game, the situational factors, in which the analyzed phenomenon

8 Ibid., 24.

9 Ibid., 23.

10 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 32.

11 Ibid.

occurs. Consequently, a theory pertaining to universality, especially if it is concerned with ethics, should account for the most immediate, local, or even personal circumstances, otherwise it might become spurious.¹²

Costello seems to comply with the theory of language games. The question is why Norma disregards Wittgenstein's emphasis on the context. As a philosopher, she must be familiar with Wittgenstein, however, when polemicizing with Costello, she advances arguments ignorant of his philosophy. On the one hand, Norma may be silent on Wittgenstein for fear that his ideas would undermine her own stance. Consequently, her biased argument would have to be judged as unreliable and redundant. On the other hand, Norma's criticism of her mother-in-law seems related to her personal dislike for Costello. Currently, Norma is without occupation, probably for lack of vacancies at the university, therefore, she could resent Costello for encroaching on her domain by lecturing at a prestigious event and drawing more interest than Norma ever does herself. Norma also appears jealous of Costello's influence on John Bernard, Norma's husband. The dislike between the two women is a recurring motive in *The Lives of Animals*. Norma is openly hostile to her mother-in-law, sparing her no spiteful comments, and limiting her access to the grandchildren. It also appears that in order to upset Costello, a declared vegetarian, Norma serves meat in the grandchildren's dinner. Accordingly, Norma resents not only Costello's achievements, but also her intimacy with John. By undermining Costello's stance, Norma might be showing her hurt pride, rather than getting involved in a serious philosophical discussion.¹³

The question is why Coetzee allows personal antipathies to influence the reliability of Norma's argument. For one thing, he might be doing it to facilitate the defense of Costello,

12 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 23-24; cf. Marie McGinn, *Guide to Wittgenstein and the "Philosophical Investigations"* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 50-51, 261-164.

13 Cf. Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal*, 133-136.

his alleged *alter ego*, and indirectly to advertise his own views. For the other, he could be using Costello's visit and her lectures as a pretext to portray the tensions between both Bernard ladies. It is also possible that Coetzee criticizes academia for its artificiality, formalism, and decreasing intellectual freedom. While all of the above motivations are partially relevant, it seems that Coetzee exposes the conflict between Norma and Costello mainly to illustrate the influence of context and non-rational motives on people's claims. As already discussed, Norma's seemingly rational arguments are affected by her professional situation, jealousy, and personal hate for her mother-in-law. Therefore, in light of her bias, Norma's stance for reducing context in rational argumentation cannot be considered as reliable.

A paradox can also be spotted in the contents of the analyzed novella. Despite Coetzee's skepticism about rational argumentation, especially with regard to animals, Amy Gutmann, in her introduction to *The Lives of Animals*, searches for philosophical arguments in favor of animal ethics. She maintains that "Coetzee's story of Elizabeth Costello's visit to Appleton College contains empirical and philosophical arguments that are relevant to the ethical issue of how human beings should treat animals."¹⁴ She seems to misunderstand Coetzee whose tenet is to explain whether argumentation, understood as a process of providing reasons in support of an idea or theory, is suitable for engendering successful animal ethics. The way he exposes Norma's inconsistencies could be perceived as a symptom of the doubt. Coetzee does not provide arguments for respecting animals; he is rather challenging them, or at least testing the need for them, implying, in a Kantian manner, that morality cannot be based solely on arguments, conditions, and formal logic but on a free and good-willed choice. Consequently, either Gutmann is unaware of Coetzee's criticism, and his implied skepticism about thought-experiments, or she does not recognize it as sound, hence she ignores it. Either way, claiming that Coetzee delivers

¹⁴ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 4.

reasons for animal ethics, Gutmann seems to miss the principal idea of *The Lives of Animals*, according to which genuine ethics, as argued by Kant, is not conditional but deontologically volitional, i.e., relying on the will to respect moral obligations.¹⁵

Curiously enough, Coetzee agreed for Gutmann's introduction. While it is unlikely that he did not recognize her misunderstanding, he might have praised her text for other merits. On the other hand, Gutmann's attitude is, in some respect, similar to that of Norma's; they both believe in the power of philosophy and rationalistic argumentation. Therefore, the reason for accepting Gutmann could be identical with the reasons for introducing Norma to the narrative. Once Norma's ignorance of context and detail is exposed, an attentive reader will recognize a similar ignorance in Gutmann, reinforcing Coetzee's message. Accordingly, as Mulhall argues, Gutmann repeats Norma's assumptions about "embedded argumentation as the only possible way in which fiction might be relevant to philosophy [i.e.] by identifying and abstracting from it a sequence of self-contained elements that uncontroversially fall under an essentially uncontroversial category called 'arguments.'"¹⁶ By allowing Gutmann's introduction, Coetzee exposes her views to critique, in the same manner in which he exposes the approach of Norma, further exposing his critique of rationalism.¹⁷

Coetzee's analysis of thought-experiments parallels Kant's critique of rationality in the sense that for both of them purely rational concepts are not enough to gain universally valid knowledge, nor does rationalistic logic suffice to assume morally right attitudes. As they claim, without empirical input, derived from the non-rational context, argumentation may turn out simplistic, often resulting in absurd, or morally unacceptable claims. To find out whether Coetzee replaces rationalism with paralogical modes of insight, or whether he

15 Derek Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 198.

16 Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal*, 22.

17 Amy Gutmann, "Introduction," in Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*.

views them as mutually supplemental, Coetzee's other perceptions of rationality will be examined.

3.2. Coetzee's Critique of Thought-Experiments as Presented in *The Lives of Animals*

Although concentrated mainly on thought-experiments, Coetzee criticizes rationalism also in empirical experiments. During her first lecture at Appleton College, Costello mentions Wolfgang Köhler, a Prussian primatologist who at the beginning of the twentieth century investigated the mental abilities of apes, particularly chimpanzees, by forcing them to figure out the ways of accessing food out of their reach. Despite eight years of experimentation, Köhler's results were inconclusive and, except for one case, they neither proved nor ruled out ape rationality. According to Costello, the debacle of Köhler's research was due to his "single-minded regimentation,"¹⁸ that is, he failed because he concentrated solely on the technical aspects of reasoning, disregarding questions of preference, sensitivity, and situational influences. Costello's reservations about Köhler's methods are rendered in the following excerpt:

At every turn Sultan [one of the tested apes] is driven to think the less interesting thought. From the purity of speculation (Why do men behave like this?) he is relentlessly propelled toward lower, practical, instrumental reason (How does one use this to get that?) and thus toward acceptance of himself as primarily an organism with an appetite that needs to be satisfied. Although his entire history, from the time his mother was shot and he was captured, through his voyage in a cage to imprisonment on this island prison camp and the sadistic games that are played around food here, leads him to ask questions about the justice of the universe and the place of this penal colony in it, a carefully plotted psychological regimen conducts him away from ethics and metaphysics toward the humbler reaches of practical reason.¹⁹

¹⁸ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

As it seems, Köhler could have been successful if, in his anthropocentric idea of rationality, he had allowed for non-analytical modes of thinking, including intuition, sympathy, and instinct. However, failing to do so he forced his apes to solve logical IQ riddles, overlooking their emotional intelligence and social skills. Köhler's rationalistic methodology could be perceived as counteractive for it limited his insight, instead of enlarging it.²⁰

There is one ape, Sultan, that seems to respond to Köhler's techno-analytical understanding of intelligence. However, Sultan's cooperation is forced by hunger, thus it is hardly genuine. His exceptionally good results do not deliver any knowledge of ape rationality; they only testify to the extent of human ignorance of animal anguish. As long as Sultan fails to conform to Köhler's expectations, Costello claims that "he [Sultan] is starved until the pangs of hunger are so intense, so overriding, that he is forced to think the right thought, namely, how to go about getting the bananas. Thus are the mental capabilities of the chimpanzee tested to their uttermost."²¹ Reason, understood as an analytical mode of insight, not only makes Köhler ignorant of animal perception, but it also justifies violence against animals.²²

According to Costello, another monkey, named Red Peter, is also a victim of painful experimentation on animals. Red Peter is an educated monkey in Kafka's 1917 short story "A Report to an Academy." Kafka might have been inspired by Köhler's experiments, and Sultan could have served as the prototype of Red Peter. Costello admits that such a correspondence is unlikely, yet she mentions it because Kafka skilfully rendered the limitedness and cruelty of Köhler's rationalization of animals. In Kafka's story, Red Peter delivers a lecture in which he describes the hardships he experienced when he was being

²⁰ Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal*, 22.

²¹ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 29.

²² Cf. Dale Jamieson, "Science, Knowledge, and Animal Minds," in *Morality's Progress: Essays on Humans, Other Animals, and the Rest of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

taught a human language. Although he still remembers the distress, once he got immersed in the order of reason, he has almost forgotten his ape past. Kafka describes the process in the following manner:

I could never have achieved what I have done had I been stubbornly set on clinging to my origins, to the remembrances of my youth. [...] In revenge, however, my memory of the past has closed the door against me more and more. I could have returned at first, had human beings allowed it, through an archway as wide as the span of heaven over the earth, but as I spurred myself on in my forced career, the opening narrowed and shrank behind me; [...] the strong wind that blew after me out of my past began to slacken; today it is only a gentle puff of air that plays around my heels; and the opening in the distance, through which it comes and through which I once came myself, has grown so small that, even if my strength and my willpower sufficed to get me back to it, I should have to scrape the very skin from my body to crawl through.²³

Having immersed himself in human culture, Red Peter cannot recollect how he felt as an animal; he admits that his access to animality has been foreclosed by his increasing rationality, which he pursued to become similar not only to Sultan but also to Köhler, a rationalist incapable of animal insight.

Due to his amnesia, Red Peter argues that his lecture “will contribute nothing essentially new”²⁴ to people's understanding of animals. One of the factors limiting their insight into animality is language. At the beginning of his lecture, Red Peter highlights his incapability of describing his ape past in a human speech: “what I felt then as an ape I can represent now only in human terms, and therefore I misrepresent it, but although I cannot reach back to the truth of the old ape life, there is no doubt that it lies somewhere in the direction I have indicated.”²⁵ Since Red Peter is unable to communicate his ape past, the lecture seems pointless; his efforts appear redundant. However, despite its pointlessness, the lecture not only takes place, but it also evokes much interest in the academic circles. It

23 Franz Kafka, “A Report to an Academy,” in *The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum Norbert Glatzer, trans. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 250.

24 Ibid., 251.

25 Ibid., 253.

is possible that Kafka made Red Peter face the academia not to praise ape cognitive abilities but rather to ridicule academia's self-indulgent narcissism. Red Peter gives a lecture on ape mentality, reason is praised for its cognitive scope, yet once it becomes clear that Red Peter does not know what he is lecturing about, the whole event turns into a farce. The speech reminds of a circus show or a satirical sketch with a clothed monkey on the stage, performing tricks to deliver entertainment for a cheering audience. Kafka caricatured academia by showing it as captivated by an ape imitating what he has previously been trained to say. Assuming Köhler's experiments on apes as the inspiration for the story, "A Report to an Academy" can be recognized as Kafka's criticism of the dominant status of human rationality.²⁶

According to Costello, Kafka's story reveals that the praise for rationalism derives from human narcissism. She claims that Red Peter did not want to become a humanized monkey. He was taught to speak, behave himself and think logically in order to prove the superiority of reflective reason over animal modes of communication and mentality. Red Peter is thus a puppet made to stand before the academia and testify to human dominance over animals. He is a victim of people's narcissistic drive to place one of their unique attributes, reason, at the center of both cognitive and moral reference.

Moreover, Red Peter evinces the ubiquity of *l'animot* in academia. Deprived of his animality, he has no choice but to take up the human idea of monkeyness and, when asked, to act accordingly. As Costello argues, he puts up a show in which he makes a "monkey" of himself. On the one hand, Costello claims that he makes a fool of himself by pretending to be someone he has already ceased to be. On the other hand, however, she reveals the *l'animot* sense of his apedom. Specifically, she implies that Red Peter acts as an ape not because he is one but because he is perceived as an ape; he espouses the culturally

26 Ido Geiger, "Writing the Lives of Animals," in *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics: Philosophical Perspectives on Literature*, ed. Anton Leist and Peter Singer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 154-155.

constructed idea of a monkey. In this sense, Red Peter yields to the expectations of his audience, which confirms the absurdity of the gathering; the academia assembles to listen to Red Peter's report to learn what they already know about apes. At the same time, the listeners confirm the social imagery connected with animals. In this regard, "A Report to an Academy" could be perceived as an early critique of the animal constructivism that Derrida exposed in his 1997 address "The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow)."²⁷

Coetzee endorses Kafka's mockery to argue that, apart from limiting cognition, the anthropocentric rationalism disturbs people's moral sensitivity to non-rational modes of being. In her first speech at the Appleton College, Costello claims that the aim of rationalism is to establish reason as "the first principle of the universe,"²⁸ and, accordingly, as the sole foundation of certainty in knowledge. She disagrees with such a worldview, subsequently referring to it as "imbecile,"²⁹ and claiming that rationalism does not suffice to properly account for such modes of perception as emotions, bodily sensitivity, and intuition. The claim reminds of Stephen R. L. Clark (b. 1945), a British philosopher, who maintains in his 1997 study entitled *The Moral Status of Animals* that by ignoring modes of thinking which respond to "the heart's affections and the plain evidence of sense,"³⁰ philosophical rationalism not only reinforces man's narcissistic tendency to confirm the privileged status of reason, but it also restricts cognition by disregarding the non-rational part of perception. Thomas Nagel, argues Costello, is an epitome of such a disregard, while Sultan and Red Peter are its victims. The tenet of their victimhood is that they are forced to things which they would not like to do, or to which they are not adapted by nature. Thus, because of reason's inability to account for animals without forcing them into

27 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 23; Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 369-418.

28 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 25.

29 Ibid., 30.

30 Stephen R. L. Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 93.

rationalistic categories, Sultan and Red Peter cannot be properly represented, which in turn disturbs people's moral attitude to them. It can be argued that Coetzee criticizes reason not for its limitations but rather for dissimulating the modes of being which exceed its cognitive scope as irrelevant, thus making them seem less worthy of sympathy and moral consideration.

Having discussed the cause for Red Peter's alienation, Coetzee projects it on Costello. Accordingly, after recalling Kafka's story, Costello proceeds to compare herself to Red Peter:

Red Peter was not an investigator of primate behavior but a branded, marked, wounded animal presenting himself as speaking testimony to a gathering of scholars. I am not a philosopher of mind but an animal exhibiting, yet not exhibiting, to a gathering of scholars, a wound, which I cover up under my clothes but touch on in every word I speak.³¹

Similarly to Kafka's protagonist, Costello feels limited by language, especially by the ways in which people conceptualize otherness, including animality. The wound of which she speaks in the above passage could be interpreted as a symbol of the limitation. Like Red Peter, she cannot express herself accurately; at times, she is lost for words, and because her language is based on anthropocentric concepts, she struggles to convey her pro-animal views in a convincing manner. Eventually, reluctant to follow Red Peter and succumb to the dominant mode of thinking, she antagonizes her audience, failing to propagate the ideals of animal welfare.

However, Costello fails not because of her insufficient understanding, but rather because her worldview exceeds the cognitive abilities of her audience. The result of the incompatibility is her increasing sense of alienation. Costello feels estranged because philosophical rationalism within which she seeks recognition does not contain her paralogical mindset. It is also because of her extended views that she suffers psychological

³¹ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 26.

discomfort: “[c]alm down, I tell myself, you are making a mountain out of a molehill. This is life. Everyone else comes to terms with it, why can’t you? *Why can’t you?*”³² The answer to the question is that she cannot ignore animal abuse because she is more sensitive and empathetic than her audience. Costello is stressed because she fails to convey her ideals; on the other hand, the failure is because her views surpass the audience’s conceptual framework. It could be argued that her distress reveals her increased understanding, rather than her disturbed perception.

In a sense, Costello resembles the image of Kafka which she refers to during her first talk, “The Philosophers and the Animals.” In her view, Kafka exemplifies profound thoughtfulness; he was an attentive observer of people, deeply concerned with the direction in which the world was heading. That included the question of animals. She attempts to identify Kafka’s concern about human mistreatment of animals as revealed in his “stare of pure surprise: surprise, astonishment, alarm.”³³ Due to his concern, Costello claims that of “all men Kafka is the most insecure in his humanity. This, he seems to say: this is the image of God?”³⁴ She pictures Kafka as a “monstrous thinking device mounted inexplicably on suffering animal bodies.”³⁵ In Costello's view, Kafka realized the extent of human violence toward animals; the metaphor of him being mounted on suffering animal bodies symbolizes his own shame for participating in the abuse. Costello shares this attitude; yet as it cannot be verified whether Kafka was indeed concerned about animal welfare, it may be assumed that the above view of him is actually Costello's own vision of herself; Kafka is only a means for projecting the vision.

At the beginning of her address, Costello claims that Kafka wrote the story of Red Peter not to campaign for animal rights, but to sympathize with Köhler’s apes, especially

32 Ibid., 69 (emphasis original).

33 Ibid., 30-31.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 30.

with Sultan, and, by extension, with other abused animals. However, her projection of Kafka's concern for animals seems to be an expression of her own sympathy for animals, rather than Kafka's. She draws a parallel between Sultan and Red Peter by claiming that they both were captured in Africa and transported to Western research institutions. As she further explains, "Red Peter and Köhler's apes then underwent a period of training intended to humanize them. Red Peter passed his course with flying colors, though at deep personal cost. Kafka's story deals with that cost: we learn what it consists in through the ironies and silences of the story."³⁶ Costello seems to assume that Kafka's purpose in the story was to show animal suffering and, possibly, to sensitize his readership to it: "[w]hatever else it may have been, his [Red Peter's] report to the academy was not a plea to be treated as a mentally defective human being, a simpleton."³⁷ However, despite her praise for Kafka's efforts, it seems doubtful if he reached the objectives mentioned by herself. The doubt emerges toward the end of Kafka's story when Red Peter claims to perform every evening and, despite being continuously misunderstood, he is rather satisfied with his life. Red Peter repeats the same story, thus, instead of sensitizing his audience to the animal hardship, he rather reinforces their anthropocentrism by telling them what they expect to hear. His complacency seems to trivialize the pro-animal cause.

Despite his declarations, however, Red Peter does not seem to be happy with his life. Although he lives with a half-trained chimpanzee, he admits to being unable to look at her in daylight because "she has the insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal."³⁸ While he "takes comfort from her as apes do,"³⁹ he feels estranged from her and, presumably, he is also afraid of her. It is noteworthy that the fear is typically human as it derives from the inability to rationalize the animal other. The inability manifests itself in

36 Ibid., 27.

37 Ibid., 26.

38 Kafka, "A Report to an Academy," 259.

39 Ibid.

Red Peter when, unable to understand the other ape, he claims in a characteristically anthropocentric manner that the ape is insane. Subsequently, the fear proves that Red Peter perceives animality along the anthropocentric categories; he has succumbed to the mode of thinking that forced him out of his home in the jungle, making him undergo a painful process of humanization, and eventually causing his solitude.

However, despite his loneliness, Red Peter seems reconciled with his fate. Although not entirely satisfied, he has learnt not to complain about his predicament:

As I look back over my development and survey what I have achieved so far, I do not complain, but I am not complacent either. With my hands in my trouser pockets, my bottle of wine on the table, I half lie and half sit in my rocking chair and gaze out of the window: if a visitor arrives, I receive him with propriety. My manager sits in the anteroom; when I ring, he comes and listens to what I have to say.⁴⁰

As already mentioned, Red Peter had no choice but to live a typically human life. He argues that becoming a human was only a survival mechanism for him:

With an effort which up till now has never been repeated I managed to reach the cultural level of an average European. In itself that might be nothing to speak of, but it is something insofar as it has helped me out of my cage and opened a special way out for me, the way of humanity. There is an excellent idiom: to fight one's way through the thick of things; that is what I have done, I have fought through the thick of things. There was nothing else for me to do, provided always that freedom was not to be my choice.⁴¹

Since Red Peter has renounced his animality in order to survive in the human world, it becomes questionable whether Kafka's aim in writing "A Report to an Academy" was to recognize animality. On the contrary, by showing Red Peter's predicament, Kafka seems to have argued that there is no hope for a better treatment of animals unless they follow Red Peter and liken themselves to humans. The irony of the claim further confirms Kafka's doubt about the possibilities of developing a successful animal ethics.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 258-259.

In *The Lives of Animals* Coetzee identifies a remedy to Kafka's skepticism by reversing the story of Red Peter. Through Costello's increasing irrationality, Coetzee seems to argue that, for animal ethics to be successful, there is no point in expecting animals to comply with the human modes of thinking, just like Red Peter did, or that rationalistic logic will eventually acknowledge animal non-rationality; instead, to approach animals in their own terms, people should exceed their anthropocentric frameworks. An illustration of such a cognitive extension is Costello's progressing irrationality, visible in her faulty arguments and frequent appeals to emotions. As already noted, her arguments become fragmented, gradually lacking cohesion and sense. Costello also experiences increasing linguistic difficulties. She struggles to make herself understandable, and in some of her claims she verges on self-contradiction. At times, she approaches paradox:

What I know is what a corpse cannot know: that it is extinct, that it knows nothing and will never know anything anymore. For an instant, before my whole structure of knowledge collapses in panic, I am alive inside that contradiction, dead and alive at the same time.⁴²

In Norma's view, her mother-in-law is confused; she denotes that Costello's claims about being alive and dead at the same time are self-contradictory. However, what Norma interprets as a symptom of confusion and irrationality may indicate Costello's moral unease about her inability to counteract animal abuse. Incapable of Red Peter's conformism, Costello struggles to tolerate the ubiquity of animal suffering. Eventually, she considers death as a relief from her accumulating moral strain and the associated feeling of powerlessness to limit animal exploitation.

Although Costello compares herself to Red Peter, her behavior and the direction of her life diverge from that of Kafka's ape; unlike Red Peter, she becomes less and less comfortable with her humanity. At the end of their respective narratives, Red Peter and

⁴² Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 26.

Costello find themselves in entirely different situations. Red Peter is complacent with his life although the price he pays for peace is a loss of his ape identity. Costello, on the other hand, leaves Appleton defeated. She is exhausted and confused. On way to the airport, she hears the following words from her son: “[t]here, there. It will soon be over,”⁴³ confirming that the only comfort for her is death.

The tenet of Coetzee’s reversal of the conclusion of “A Report to an Academy” is to present Costello as a contradiction of Red Peter. She becomes nonconformist with the human-centered modes of thinking. However, Costello insists on comparing herself with Red Peter. She maintains that Red Peter is a literary version of Sultan. Considering her emphasis on having “a literal cast of mind,”⁴⁴ it can be argued that when she compares herself to Kafka’s ape, she actually means its prototype, that is, Köhler’s Sultan. The claim could explain why Costello persists in treating Köhler and his experiments as Kafka’s inspiration despite there being no verifiable evidence for it:

I am not a Kafka scholar. In fact I am not a scholar at all. My status in the world does not rest on whether I am right or wrong in claiming that Kafka read Köhler’s book. But I would like to think he did.⁴⁵

Although she encourages to sympathize with animals, Costello never adopts Red Peter’s perspective. However, she frequently imagines Sultan’s possible thoughts, reproducing his internal monologues and the possible questions he might have been asking himself when tested by Köhler. Accordingly, it could be argued that Costello identifies with Sultan, not Red Peter, hence confirming her requirement for literalness in claims concerning animals.

It is also possible that Costello is Coetzee’s version of Red Peter’s chimpanzee mate. Both of them bear marks of physical anguish; the mate is a “half-broken animal,” whereas

43 Ibid., 69.

44 Ibid., 30.

45 Ibid., 27.

Costello claims to be “a wounded animal.”⁴⁶ They are associated with irrationality; the former is called “insane”⁴⁷ and “half-mad,”⁴⁸ while Costello approaches an emotional breakdown. Both of them seem distressed by their social roles. Kafka writes that “apes think with their bellies,”⁴⁹ and since Costello is a vegetarian and most of her claims are concerned with dietary issues, it could be claimed that, in a metaphorical way, Costello also thinks through her belly. She appears to be the voice of Red Peter's silenced mate who unlike him has still not lost contact with animality; in this regard, Costello's claim that she can imagine animal modes of being becomes literal, at least within literary intertextuality. The parallel also means that Coetzee's aim in *The Lives of Animals* is to complement Red Peter's report with the non-rationalist perspective of his mate, missing in “A Report to an Academy.” It could be argued that Coetzee is not only inspired by Kafka, but he also supplements him.

At this point, it should be mentioned that Costello's difficulty to express her views invokes the Lyotardian notion of the *différend*, an incompatibility between one's meaning and the language game within which the meaning is conveyed. There is no rule of judgement according to which the meaning could be confirmed or discarded. Usually, a *différend* manifests itself through the awkward feeling of lacking proper words to accurately express one's thoughts or emotions. Costello's distress is an example of a *différend*; she phrases her insight into animals but language distorts her message, making it seem non-sensical to her audience. Her susceptibility to the *différend* is another factor which, in her own opinion, makes her similar to Red Peter. Costello provides the following explanation:

Red Peter was not an investigator of primate behavior but a branded, marked,

46 Ibid., 26.

47 Kafka, “A Report to an Academy,” 259.

48 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 30.

49 Kafka, “A Report to an Academy,” 253.

wounded animal presenting himself as speaking testimony to a gathering of scholars. I am not a philosopher of mind but an animal exhibiting, yet not exhibiting, to a gathering of scholars, a wound, which I cover up under my clothes but touch on in every word I speak.⁵⁰

The wound mentioned in the above citation refers to the *différend*, and it symbolizes Costello's discomfort felt at failing to communicate non-anthropocentric meanings to an anthropocentric audience. She speaks, yet language lacks proper concepts to convey her views, dissimulating her message. It could be claimed that her failure is because "*différends* defy resolution."⁵¹

Red Peter faces a similar predicament; he is conversant, he manages linguistic notions well, yet the language he speaks does not allow him to express concepts exceeding the anthropocentric paradigm, therefore, he dissimulates apedom during his speech. Animality presents a *différend* for Red Peter. The ape's difficulties at expressing his animal descent reveal that the *différend* stands for a paradox of language. On the one hand, it enables communication by providing the interlocutors with a set of shared concepts; on the other hand, it produces confusion by exceeding the accepted communication framework. It could be argued that Costello's difficulties at conveying her pro-animal views are due to the *différends* embedded in the rationalistic discourse.

While exposing *différends* could be a method of criticizing rationalism, Coetzee realizes the method's limited applicability in real life. Faced with an academic audience, Costello understands that the criticism of reason within the rationalistic framework condemns the critique to obscurity and comicality, thus doing more harm than good to animal welfare. In a self-reflective thought, Costello argues in the following manner:

I ask the question and then answer it for you. Or rather, I allow Red Peter, Kafka's Red Peter, to answer it for you. Now that I am here, says Red Peter, in

⁵⁰ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 26.

⁵¹ Alan D. Schrift, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), s.v. "Jean-François Lyotard," 523.

my tuxedo and bow tie and my black pants with a hole cut in the seat for my tail to poke through (I keep it turned away from you, you do not see it), now that I am here, what is there for me to do? Do I in fact have a choice? If I do not subject my discourse to reason, whatever that is, what is left for me but to gibber and emote and knock over my water glass and generally make a monkey of myself?⁵²

To the above call, Coetzee offers a Kantian solution: instead of renouncing reason, one should try to supplement it with direct bodily experience. There is no need of “making a monkey of oneself” to understand animals; humans can embrace the animal perspective because they share the same “substrate of life”⁵³ with animals, that is, the experience of “fullness, embodiedness, the sensation [...] of being alive to the world.”⁵⁴ Elisa Aaltola, an animal studies researcher of Manchester Metropolitan University, argues that “Coetzee pays attention to the element that Nagel highlights in his paper: consciousness in the phenomenal sense. [...] This is where the key to understanding lies [...]. We can identify [with animals] because we, too, are experiencing beings.”⁵⁵ Following Kant, Coetzee recognizes the cognitive value of empirical input and, against Ludwig Wittgenstein, he designates it as the ground for extending one's understanding to animals.⁵⁶

However, an uncritical connection of animality and embodiment verges on the speciesism of *l'animot*. It reduces the variety of animal life to the generic concept of body, obliterating differences not only between individual creatures, but also between entire animal species. Embodiment and fullness are human concepts; basing people's similarity to animals on their shared embodiment, Costello projects human concepts on animals, effacing their individuality according to the logic of *l'animot*. Symptomatically, despite Coetzee's concern with animality, the only real-life creatures in *The Lives of Animals* are

52 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 23.

53 Ibid., 35.

54 Ibid., 33.

55 Elisa Aaltola, “Coetzee and Alternative Animal Ethics,” in Leist and Singer, *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics*, 125.

56 Cf. Cary Wolfe, “In the Shadow of Wittgenstein's Lion: Language, Ethics, and the Question of the Animal,” in *Zoontologies: the Question of the Animal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), chap. 1.

people. Animals appear in it as mere phantasms. In her arguments on animal values, Costello seldom mentions her personal dealings with real-life animals. And when she does, it seems that her most intimate encounters with animals are limited to wearing leather and stepping on vermin. While speaking of animal embodiment, Costello does not refer to individual animals, nor does she mean animality as a form of life, but she projects the concept of embodiment on animals for their easier identification, thus following the logic of *l'animot*. She uses animals as metaphors to present her own point of view. Accordingly, despite her defense of animals, Costello's views and deeds with regard to animals appear self-contradictory and unconvincing. It is noteworthy that she is aware of her inconsistencies; she admits not only to wearing leather and killing vermin, but also to ignoring animal suffering in the abattoirs near her house.⁵⁷

When asked to explain her inconsistencies, Costello replies by calling them “degrees of obscenity.”⁵⁸ On the one hand, Costello’s reply may be interpreted as a sign of her confusion, or as a sign of her self-criticism. On the other hand, it entices the interlocutor, named Garrard, to reveal the abuses within the rationalistic discourse. In response to Costello's reply, Garrard advances the following argument: “one can draw a distinction between eating meat and wearing leather,”⁵⁹ unwittingly expressing the conviction that anything can be justified with a right choice of arguments. Not only does Garrard emerge as a rationalistic hypocrite, but he also demonstrates that the reality can be distorted to make it fit the rationalist framework. Garrard's claim confirms Costello's vision of reason as “simply a vast tautology.”⁶⁰

Costello draws the following conclusion from Gerard's response: “reason may be not

57 Sundhya Walther, “Refusing to Speak: The Ethics of Animal Silence and Sacrifice in Coetzee and Derrida,” *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) 12, no. 3 (2014): 79.

58 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 44.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., 25.

the being of the universe but on the contrary merely the being of the human brain.”⁶¹ She maintains that rationalistic categories are not objective facts of the world but solely products of human reason. Coetzee argues that the most immediate victims of the rationalistic distortion of reality are animals. Moreover, since rationalistic discourse is preoccupied with validating reason as its basis, and negating the non-rational modes of insight, Coetzee seems doubtful about its objectivity and future development. The doubt emerges in the *Diary of a Bad Year*, published in 2007, in which Coetzee’s *alter ego*, Señor C, asks whether “the contest to see whose terms warm-blooded life will continue on this planet does not prove human reason the winner.”⁶² The fact of posing reason “as the first principle of the universe”⁶³ does not mean that reason is actually the principal cognitive faculty. What it proves instead is the anthropocentric bias of rationalism.⁶⁴

Although critical of reason, Coetzee does not reject it entirely. Costello may discard the language of philosophy, discrediting its rationalistic concepts as one-sided, yet the venue at which she expresses her views refers to a clearly philosophical tradition. She delivers her speech before an academia of philosophers, professors and people well-acquainted with the order of reason. By setting Costello's speech in a scholarly context, Coetzee recognizes the importance of philosophical discourse, encouraging to supplement the rationalistic framework with the paralogical modes of thinking. In this sense, Coetzee favors a dialectical approach to reason, condemning the excess to which contemporary research disregards the non-rational modes of thinking, not rationalism as a whole. By assessing scientific tests of animal intelligence as “imbecile,”⁶⁵ Costello does not argue against examining analytical skills of animals, but she encourages the people who conduct such tests to consider characteristically animal modes of perceiving the world, among

61 Ibid., 23.

62 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* (London: Harvill Secker, 2007), 71.

63 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 25.

64 Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, 203.

65 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 30.

them instinct and direct sensual experience. In Coetzee's view, a dialectical use of reason, especially when it allows for non-rational perceptions, increases the likelihood of avoiding speciesism and confusion about animal rights.⁶⁶

The ancient Greeks used the term dialectic to refer to various methods of reasoning and discussion in order to discover the truth. For Plato, dialectics represented the highest degree of knowledge; for Aristotle, it constituted a probabilistic syllogism. More recently, Kant designated dialectics as the analysis of the obstacles to reason. According to Kant, reason has an inherent tendency to exceed the realm of experience and indulge in transcendental speculation. While doing so, it may commit errors which it cannot verify due to a lack of a reliable frame of reference. As Kant argued, the error occurs when “the subjective necessity of a certain connection of our conceptions, is regarded as an objective necessity of the determination of things in themselves.”⁶⁷ Kant's transcendental dialectics is a critique of such errors; its objective is to expose the limits and transgressions of reason in order to foreclose unscientific conclusions and prevent metaphysical dogmatism. Kant highlights that such a dialectics requires a constant effort, discipline and self-criticism; as he claimed, transcendental dialectics involves “a critique of understanding and reason in regard to their hyperphysical use.”⁶⁸ Consequently, a dialectical approach in the Kantian sense means both the study and critique of reason's own activity.⁶⁹

It could be argued that Costello's claim about reason's narcissistic drive to totality concurs with the fallacy which Kant recognizes in reason and its tendency to exceed experience. In an ironic tone, she claims the following: “of course reason will validate reason as the first principle of the universe – what else should it do? Dethrone itself? [...] If there were a position from which reason could attack and dethrone itself, reason would

66 Ibid., 62.

67 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 211.

68 Ibid., 71.

69 Cf. Michelle Grier, “The Logic of Illusion and the Antinomies,” in *A Companion to Kant*, ed. Graham Bird (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 205.

already have occupied that position; otherwise it would not be total.”⁷⁰ However, the tenet of Coetzee's critique of reason is not its self-aggrandizing narcissism, nor is it its tendency to employ misguided, logocentric and speciesist cognitive presuppositions; rather, claims Mulhall, “it is to fail to acknowledge that one is doing so, and hence to acknowledge that other presuppositions are at least possible.”⁷¹ The greatest failure of reason is to foreclose the possibility of its own imperfection. A way of accepting and responding to such a possibility is Kantian dialectics.

It is thus the rationalistic arrogance of the dialectical modes of thinking that Coetzee criticizes. The above-discussed narcissism of reason could be deemed an aspect of the arrogance. According to Costello, a remedy to the arrogance can be found in recognizing the cognitive value of emotions and empathy. In the ensuing quote, she explains the advantage of emotions over pure rationality: “there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another,”⁷² therefore, “[we] open [our] heart and listen to what [it] says.”⁷³ However, Peter Singer, the author of one of the “Reflections” collected in *The Lives of Animals*, presents the following argument: “[w]hen people say we should only feel – and at times Costello comes close to that in her lecture – I’m reminded of Göring, who said, ‘I think with my blood.’ See where it led him. We can’t take our feelings as moral data, immune from rational criticism.”⁷⁴ Singer points to the Kantian idea that without reason there is neither morality, nor orientation, nor judgement. However, Singer does not recognize that Coetzee urges merely to supplement reason with affective modes of insight. Coetzee does not renounce reason as that would mean replacing the extreme of rationalism with the opposite extreme of absolute irrationalism. He agrees with Singer’s words, “I feel, but I also think about what I feel,”⁷⁵ but, at the same time, he

70 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 25.

71 Mulhall, *Wounded Animal*, 43.

72 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 35.

73 Ibid., 37.

74 Peter Singer, “Reflections,” in Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 88-89.

75 Ibid., 88.

stresses that the non-rational modes of perception require more attention to what they have thus far received in the rationalistic discourse.⁷⁶

The proof of Coetzee's dialectical rationalism is Costello's understanding of joy. Although she criticizes pure rationalism for its limitedness, she endorses the idea of fullness as the ultimate form of identification with animals. In the ensuing passage, she relates fullness of being to Nagel's skepticism about human insight into non-human forms of thinking:

To be a living bat is to be full of being; being fully a bat is like being fully human, which is also to be full of being. Bat-being in the first case, human-being in the second, maybe; but those are secondary considerations. To be full of being is to live as a body-soul. One name for the experience of full being is *joy*.⁷⁷

It should be noted that fullness is not an empirical concept; on the contrary, it is a cultural construct. People access it only as a hypothetical postulate of reason, an abstraction, and never as part of sensual experience. Therefore, when Costello claims that fullness can be experienced as joy, she does not refer to the bodily sensation of pleasure, but to the feeling of completeness and internal harmony. In Chapter IV, it will be argued that the joy as conceived by Costello is enabled by the faculty of the sympathetic imagination.

3.3. Dialectics in Light of Richard E. Nisbett's Research

Coetzee's skepticism about the cognitive value of thought-experiments has been confirmed in socio-psychological studies. Richard E. Nisbett (b. 1941), a University of Michigan scholar and a world-acclaimed psychologist, in his 2015 *Mindware: Tools for Smart Thinking* discusses three fundamental features of how reason processes information and

⁷⁶ Sławomir Masłoń, *Coetzee: Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej* [Coetzee: A Guidebook by Krytyka Polityczna] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2009), 319-324.

⁷⁷ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 33

turns it into knowledge. Nisbett's first claim is that human thinking is never based on a direct perception of reality. People pass judgements, including observations of the natural world, relying on a combination of empirical stimuli and their own previous knowledge, impressions, and opinions. The newly-acquired knowledge is thus an inference of various factors affecting the cognitive process; Nisbett argues that “our understanding of the world is always a matter of *construal* – of inference and interpretation.”⁷⁸ He warns against relying on purely rationalistic analysis as reason frequently manipulates the empirical input to make the new perceptions compatible with the existing rationalizations. In Nisbett's view, the main limitation of logical analysis is its detachment from the actual world:

People have discovered many different ways to reduce the likelihood of making an error in reasoning. One way is to obey the rules of *formal logic* – rules for reasoning that can be described in purely abstract terms without making any contact at all with real-world facts. If the structure of your argument can be mapped directly onto one of the valid forms of argument that logic specifies, you're guaranteed a *deductively valid conclusion*. Whether your conclusion is true is a different matter entirely and depends on the truth of your premises – the statements that precede your conclusion.⁷⁹

The conclusions of formal logic are necessarily deduced from the premises on which they are based, regardless of the ethical quality of the premisses, which means that the logical soundness of a given argument does not entail its ethical validity. According to Nisbett, Western logic is divested from excessive references to the real world to make sure that “the formal structure of an argument can be laid bare without any interference from prior beliefs.”⁸⁰ The other reason for the separation is to avoid unrelated disturbances in the process of the argumentation. As already noted, avoidance of external disruptions for reasons of clarity is also present in thought-experiments, especially with respect to non-

⁷⁸ Richard E. Nisbett, *Mindware: Tools for Smart Thinking* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 16 (emphasis original).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 205 (emphasis original).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 221.

rational modes of being. However, thought-experimenters reduce external interferences solely in abstract speculations, whereas Nisbett regards such reductionism as characteristic of all rationalistic thinking. Criticizing the reductionist approach, Nisbett argues that “formal logic [...] doesn’t constitute the basis of everyday thought. It’s primarily a way of thinking that can catch some kinds of errors in reasoning.”⁸¹ Formal strictness is thus not only unrealistic, but also ineffective. Interestingly enough, Nisbett’s claim undermines Kant who argued for basing the principles of one’s behavior, in particular the maxims of one’s moral judgement, on logical grounds.⁸²

Nisbett argues that “there are some reasons to suspect that most of [...] formal logic will be of limited value in solving problems in everyday life.”⁸³ The most important reason discussed by him is the disconnectedness between rationalistic arguments and truth: “[v]alidity has nothing to do with truth. An argument can be invalid, but its conclusion can be true. An argument is valid if it has the proper structure, but its conclusion can nevertheless be false.”⁸⁴ Nisbett analyzes the two types of formal logic, syllogism and propositional logic, demonstrating that their deductive correctness does not necessarily entail truthfulness. As it turns out, neither syllogistic nor propositional logic guarantee that rationally-deduced arguments are morally acceptable. On the contrary, they may yield ethically inadmissible yet formally correct conclusions. An example of a logically sound but morally doubtful argument is the reasoning of deep ecologists discussed in the first chapter of the present dissertation: the Earth’s homeostasis is threatened by the growth of human population; only a quarter of the current human population will ensure the Earth’s homeostasis; therefore, to keep the Earth in balance, human population should be reduced by three quarters. Despite its formal validity, such a type of logic is discarded both for

81 Ibid.

82 See Immanuel Kant, preface to *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington, 3rd ed. (1785; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 1-5.

83 Nisbett, *Mindware*, 210.

84 Ibid.

ethical and practical reasons.

The second reason for the logics-ethics disconnectedness discussed by Nisbett is the separation of form from content in rationalistic arguments. According to Nisbett, Western thought advocates the division in order to confirm the validity of its claims. The separation of form from content is also a necessary requirement for the universality of science. In Nisbett's view, science is “categorization plus empirical rules and a commitment to logical principles.”⁸⁵ Paradoxically, although a scientific progress is based on the inductive method of deriving general claims from empirical data, the requirement of formality separates science from the empirical input. That, in turn, seems to violate the falsifiability criterion, according to which a “theory is 'scientific' if one is prepared to specify in advance a crucial experiment (or observation) which can falsify it, and it is pseudoscientific if one refuses to specify such a 'potential falsifier’.”⁸⁶ The falsifiability principle was introduced by Karl Popper (1902-1994), an Austro-British philosopher of science, in his 1935 study entitled *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* as the method for differentiating between science and non-science. In Popper's view, scientific knowledge is produced by way of induction, that is, general concepts are formulated basing on the observation of diverse yet repetitive phenomena. However, since one cannot foreclose an exception undermining the observed regularity, Popper maintains that no inductive science can ever be reliable. Pursuit of knowledge in his view can only be deductive, that is, based on a universal validity. The basis of Popper's skepticism is the idea of science as a hermetic, formally valid system of laws and interdependencies. Such a categorical view of science retroactively separates it from its empirical base. However, while the view is logically valid, it does not explain how science works in real life. On the contrary, it obscures the process of scientific discovery. As Nisbett maintains, “research is a slog

⁸⁵ Ibid., 232.

⁸⁶ Imre Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes: Philosophical Papers*, ed. John Worrall and Gregory Currie, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 3.

through findings that support or contradict the theory to one degree or another.”⁸⁷ Science is thus constantly in touch with the content it describes, going through continual adjustments, optimization, or re-formulation. In contrast to Popper, science is not undermined but verified by its empirical referent. The quality of science is improved by the requirement of adjusting research to change and uncertainty.⁸⁸

It appears that ethics remains in an analogical relation to logic as science. In order to be ethically sound, reasoning must account for the context, third-party influences, and the consequences of its own conclusions. Similarly to Coetzee, Nisbett claims that “we often underestimate – or fail to notice at all – some of the most important situational influences that markedly affect beliefs and behavior,”⁸⁹ therefore, reasoning ought to exceed strict rationalism, acknowledging emotions, preferences, and contextual dispositions. Accordingly, the third reason of the logics-ethics disconnectedness is the logics' disregard of situatedness. In his 1986 study *The Alphabet Effect*, Robert K. Logan (b. 1939), a physicist at the University of Toronto, maintains that the Western emphasis on logicity and limitation of contextual interference originated in the ancient Greek clarity of definitions, argumentative cohesion, and the Hellenic philosophers' pursuit of disambiguation as well as clear-cut solutions. He discusses “the first scientists and philosophers who, when confronted with the either-or choice between logic and observation, chose logic.”⁹⁰ Logan attributes the success of Western civilization to its ancient emphasis on logical rigor and clarity of concepts. He also recognizes the limitations of the Western paradigm: “the Greeks in a sense became slaves to the linear either-or orientation of their logic. And as a result, their imagination was limited, making it

87 Nisbett, *Mindware*, 260.

88 Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*, 1-7, 124; cf. Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1935; London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), ch. 4.

89 Nisbett, *Mindware*, 34.

90 Robert K. Logan, *The Alphabet Effect: The Impact Of The Phonetic Alphabet On The Development Of Western Civilization* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 116.

difficult for them to conceive of the concept of zero.”⁹¹ Basing on Logan's study, it could be argued that Western logic is unlikely to extend its paradigm over the paralogical modes of cognition due to its neglect of contingency, ambiguity, and vagueness.

The above claims are confirmed by Nisbett: “Western thought is analytic and emphasizes logical concepts of identity and insistence on noncontradiction.”⁹² He argues that the Aristotelian rules of logical thinking, noncontradiction, and the polarization of concepts not only minimize the role of context, and downplay contradiction as a symptom of process, but they also disregard non-logical factors such as emotions and preferences. The insistence on categorization causes the fundamental attribution error:

The Greek insistence on an unchanging or highly stable world echoes down through the centuries. The extreme Western insistence on attributing human behavior to a person's enduring dispositions rather than to situational factors – the fundamental attribution error – is directly traceable to Greek metaphysics.⁹³

Lee David Ross (b. 1942), a social psychologist at Stanford University, defines the fundamental attribution error as “a general tendency to overestimate the importance of personal or dispositional factors to environmental influence [or to] the impact of relevant environmental forces and constraints.”⁹⁴ The attribution bias is frequently the cause of people's mistakes, personal and social injustice, and a deterioration of people's morale and ethical standards. Argues Nisbett: “[the] failure to recognize the importance of contexts and situations and the consequent overestimation of the role of personal dispositions is [...] the most pervasive and consequential inferential mistake we make.” An immediate consequence of this “context blindness”⁹⁵ is people's tendency to overestimate the role of dispositional factors, among them preferences, personality features, skills, plans, and

⁹¹ Logan, *The Alphabet Effect*, 153.

⁹² Nisbett, *Mindware*, 241.

⁹³ Ibid., 233.

⁹⁴ Lee David Ross, “The Intuitive Psychologist and his Shortcomings: Distortions in the Attribution Process,” in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. L. Berkowitz (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 184.

⁹⁵ Nisbett, *Mindware*, 34.

motives, while ignoring situational circumstances and the role of what Nisbett refers to as the schemas of behavior.⁹⁶

3.4. The Origins of the Schemas of Behavior

It is worth mentioning that the concept of behavioral schemas, or schemata, was first introduced by Immanuel Kant, who defined them as the *a priori* principles used by the imagination to associate empirical intuitions with the transcendental categories of the understanding. By introducing schemata into his system, Kant bridged the two “otherwise heterogeneous poles of 'thought' and 'sensation',”⁹⁷ ensuring that the *a priori* concepts are meaningful and important. Numerous critics of Kant have emphasized the significance of schematism. Martin Heidegger recognized Kant's solution to the gap between the categories of the understanding and the *sensibilia* as “the innermost essence of ontological knowledge.”⁹⁸ In his 1973 study entitled *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, he claimed that apart from making sense of transcendental concepts, the doctrine of schematism was “the decisive stage of the laying of the ground for *Metaphysica Generalis*.”⁹⁹ Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), an American logician known for developing pragmatism, asserted that “if the schemata had been considered early enough, they would have overgrown his [Kant's] whole work.”¹⁰⁰ Umberto Eco (1932–2016), an Italian writer and a literary critic, in his 1997 *Kant and Platypus*, followed Heidegger's and Pierce's praise for Kant's schematism: “if we were to reconsider the problem of Kantian schematism, much of

96 Cf. Norman Triplett, “The Dynamogenic Factors in Pacemaking and Competition,” *American Journal of Psychology* 9 (July 1, 1898): 507–533, <https://ia801601.us.archive.org/8/items/jstor-1412188/1412188.pdf>.

97 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 120–125; cf. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), §8.

98 Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (1973; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 78.

99 *Ibid.*, 79.

100 Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, eds., *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931–1935), 258–259.

the semantics of this century, from the truth–functional to the structural variety, would find itself in difficulty. And this is what has happened in the area usually referred to as 'cognitive studies'.”¹⁰¹

It seems that in the twentieth century Kant's doctrine of schematism had the greatest influence on the work of Jean Piaget (1896-1980), a Swiss clinical psychologist, known for his research in the cognitive development of children. Piaget emphasized the Kantian idea that schemata are developed in time. He argued that a schema is a mental structure created by children during their interactions with the external world. As children gain more experience, their schemata become more complex and nuanced. Eventually, after frequent reformulations of their schemata, children develop their specific ways of understanding the world by relating to their own experiences and knowledge, and subsequently by employing the knowledge to deal with more complicated problems. The schemata underlie intuitions, beliefs, and stereotypes, preceding the formation of prejudices. Piaget's theory partially underlies Nisbett's view of the schemas of thinking.¹⁰²

Because of the schemas' influence on thinking, the results of thought experiments must be approached cautiously. Nisbett demonstrates his skepticism with regard to pure rationalism in the following excerpt:

We have schemas for virtually every kind of thing we encounter. There are schemas for “house,” “family,” “civil war,” “insect,” “fast food restaurant” (lots of plastic, bright primary colors, many children, so-so food), and “fancy restaurant” (quiet, elegant decor, expensive, high likelihood the food will be quite good). We depend on schemas for construal of the objects we encounter and the nature of the situation we're in.¹⁰³

On the one hand, schemas specify people's communal behavior, traditions, and

101 Umberto Eco, *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition*, trans. Alastair McEwen (1997; San Diego: Harvest Books, 2000), 123.

102 Jean Piaget, foreword to *The Origin of Intelligence in the Child*, trans. Margaret Cook (New York: International Universities Press, 1952), ix-xi; cf. J. M. Gallagher and D. K. Reid, *The Learning Theory of Piaget and Inhelder* (Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, 1981).

103 Nisbett, *Mindware*, 19.

judgements. As Nisbett argues, if “we lacked schemas for weddings, funerals, or visits to the doctor – with their tacit rules for how to behave in each of these situations – we would constantly be making a mess of things.”¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, due to their ubiquitous presence, schemas may disrupt people's perception of the world. Therefore, relying on one's own conceptual apparatus, as in the case of the thought experiments, verges on what cognitive psychologists refer to as “naive realism.”¹⁰⁵ Nisbett indirectly repeats Kant's argument against pure rationalism: a mere rational reflection cannot yield reliable knowledge because “our construal of the nature and meaning of events is massively dependent on stored schemas and the inferential processes they initiate and guide.”¹⁰⁶ Coetzee's criticism of thought-experiments seems to derive from a similar skepticism about the possibilities of rational thought.

3.5. Formal Logic and Eastern Dialectics

In order to overcome the rationalistic predicament, Nisbett advises to consider situational influences and dispositional factors. He proposes Eastern holistic thinking and dialectical reasoning as alternatives to the Western preoccupation with decontextualized analysis, schemata, and superiority of formal validity over practical truthfulness:

Easterners tend to have a *holistic* perspective on the world. They see objects (including people) in their contexts, they're inclined to attribute behavior to situational factors, and they attend closely to relationships between people and between objects. Westerners have a more analytic perspective. They attend to the object, notice its attributes, categorize the object on the basis of those attributes, and think about the object in terms of the rules that they assume apply to objects of that particular category.¹⁰⁷

104 Ibid., 20.

105 Lee Ross and Andrew Ward, “Naive Realism in Everyday Life: Implications for Social Conflict and Misunderstanding,” in *Values and Knowledge*, ed. Edward S. Reed, Terrance Brown, and Elliot Turiel (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associated, 1996), 110.

106 Nisbett, *Mindware*, 22.

107 Ibid., 48 (emphasis original).

Not only are East Asians more attentive to context than Westerners, but they also perceive contradiction as a symptom of progress. According to Nisbett, Easterners, especially in China, pay substantial attention to social context:

Eastern thought produces more accurate beliefs about some aspects of the world and the causes of human behavior than Western thought. Eastern thought prompts attention to the contextual factors influencing the behavior of objects and humans. It also prompts recognition of the likelihood of change in all kinds of processes and in individuals.¹⁰⁸

Kaiping Peng, a University of California scholar in psychology, demonstrates that East Asians' attention to context derives from their dialectical tradition. In Peng's view, there are three principles of Eastern dialecticism: the principle of change, the principle of contradiction as an element of change, and the principle of relationships, the latter also known as holism. These principles are mutually related: change produces contradiction, and contradiction engenders change; the interplay of change and contradiction means that individual parts approach each other, becoming reciprocally deterministic. Chinese dialectic holism attends more broadly to the object's context and to its relations with other objects.¹⁰⁹

In his 2003 book called *The Geography of Thought*, Nisbett attributes the holism of Easterners to their specific socioeconomic background: in contrast to ancient Greece, whose mountainous landscape hindered agriculture but encouraged solitary occupations, Chinese livelihoods depended on agricultural activity, especially rice cultivation, requiring more cooperation and a holistic perspective. Nisbett advances the following conclusion:

The Greeks were therefore able to act on their own to a greater extent than were the Chinese. Not feeling it necessary to maintain harmony with their fellows at any cost, the Greeks were in the habit of arguing with one another in the marketplace and debating one another in the political assembly [whereas]

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 241.

¹⁰⁹ Kaiping Peng and Richard E. Nisbett, "Culture, Dialectics, and Reasoning About Contradiction," *American Psychologist* 54 (1999): 744. Also available at https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/91930/culture_and_dialectics.pdf?sequence=1.

Agricultural peoples [of Far East] needed to get along with one another – not necessarily to like one another – but to live together in a reasonably harmonious fashion.¹¹⁰

Due to the Eastern focus on collectivism, contextual influences, and an acceptance of change, the Chinese have developed one of the greatest civilizations in the entire history of the world, making significant discoveries in natural sciences, mathematics, and philosophy, without ever developing formal logic.¹¹¹

Similarly to Coetzee, Nisbett is not entirely critical of the analytic approach, claiming that due to the Western separation of form from its content, “Westerners are spared some logical errors that Easterners make.”¹¹² The two perspectives can be mutually complementary. Yet Nisbett argues that “the holistic perspective saves Easterners from some serious errors in understanding why other people behave as they do. Moreover, the reluctance to make dispositional attributions contributes to the Eastern belief in the capacity of people to change.”¹¹³ Therefore, with regard to moral arguments, Nisbett recommends the East Asian dialectic approach.

Nisbett claims that dialectical thinking was re-introduced in the West in the nineteenth century but its main development coincided with the advancement of the twentieth-century postformalism. The modern Western dialecticism resembles the Eastern thought due to the West's development of the pragmatic reasoning schemas, that is, “abstract knowledge structures induced from ordinary life experiences [...] consisting of a set of generalized, context-sensitive rules which, unlike purely syntactic rules, are defined in terms of classes of goals [...] and relationships to these goals.”¹¹⁴ The purpose of the pragmatic reasoning

110 Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently . . . and Why* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 33-34.

111 Nisbett, *Mindware*, 224.

112 Ibid., 241.

113 Ibid., 48.

114 Patricia W. Cheng and Keith J. Holyoak, “Pragmatic Reasoning Schemas,” *Cognitive Psychology* 17 (1985): 395. Also available at <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/25556/0000098.pdf?sequence=1>.

schemas is not to provide correct solutions but to assess whether one behaves in a proper way. Accordingly, the pragmatic schemas refer to rules of moral conduct, with little regard for logical validity. The branch of ethics dealing with what ought to be done is called deontic ethics, from Greek *deon*, meaning duty. While Nisbett implies that the pragmatic schemas of reasoning parallel Chinese dialecticism, he fails to mention that the greatest proponent of deontic ethics in Western history was Immanuel Kant.

3.6. Kant and Eastern Dialectics

There is an indirect yet significant link between Kant and the Eastern thought. According to Martin Schönfeld, a University of South Florida philosophy scholar, the link is traceable to Kant's 1749 doctoral dissertation entitled *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces*, rejected by Kant's supervisor, Martin Knutzen (1713-1751), supposedly due to the dissertation's lack of congruence with the prevailing thought doctrine, and for Kant's ignorance of the contemporary discoveries in natural sciences. Schönfeld argues that the main cause of Kant's failure was his rejection of Newtonian physics: by the mid-eighteenth century, "a consensus emerged in Europe according to which there is only one good way of studying forces, Newton's way, which, incidentally, differed from Kant's own."¹¹⁵ Unlike Newtonians, who deemed all of nature as unchanging and pre-determined,¹¹⁶ Kant argued for the post-Leibnizian view according to which force, mass, and space remained in a complementary dynamics with each other. Force acts by stretching itself out, and when it does so, it radiates as a field, generating space, structure and matter. The characteristic feature of Kant's ontology is his emphasis on the interactivity of the elements: force generates space, and space orders force by inducing a

¹¹⁵ Martin Schönfeld, "Kant's Early Dynamics," in Bird, *A Companion to Kant*, 33.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Ernan McMullin, *Newton on Matter and Activity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 32-33.

spacial force field. Without space, force would lack its field, without which it would not stretch itself out, and in consequence it would not generate matter. For Kant, force, space, and matter determined each other, even though he was unable to prove the extent of their mutual determination.¹¹⁷

Manfred Kuehn, the Philipps-Universität Marburg scholar and Kant's biographer, asserts that Kant “wrestled with one of the central disputes in German natural philosophy during the early part of the eighteenth century, namely the problem of the measurement of force.”¹¹⁸ In the dispute, Kant mediated between the Newtonian physics, the Cartesian view of nature as inert mass, and Leibniz's pre-established harmony of substances. According to Kuehn, Kant eventually adopted a modified version of the Leibnizian model: “Kant's pre-established harmony is different from that of Leibniz in the sense that what is pre-established is not just the internal states of substances, but both the internal states of substances *and* their interactions.”¹¹⁹ Michael Friedman (b. 1947), a Stanford University scholar, confirms that Kant did not claim that substances merely agreed with each other, as Leibniz argued, but that they mutually depended on one another. Accordingly, not only did Kant revise the Descartes-Leibniz controversy in light of Newtonian physics, but he also advanced a research method of synthesizing opposite views; the method became fundamental for Kant's *Critique*.¹²⁰

Apart from arguing for the mutual interdependence of substances, Kant persisted with the Spinozian idea of self-organizing nature; he pondered on the puzzle of action at a distance, especially how gravity travels in empty space, opposing the Newtonian physicists who thought the question of gravitational force field unsolvable for lack of empirical evidence.¹²¹ Kant was also preoccupied with the metaphysical studies of force, a domain

117 Schönfeld, “Kant's Early Dynamics,” 40.

118 Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 89.

119 Ibid., 92.

120 Michael Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 5.

121 McMullin, *Newton on Matter and Activity*, 46.

considered unscientific after Newton's formulation of the laws of gravity and motion:

For Newton and his followers, studies of force were to be restricted to what can be observed, quantified, and tested. Metaphysical studies of force, on the other hand, were conceptual and thus deemed unscientific and arbitrary by British Newtonians.¹²²

Despite its non-conformist character, Kant's *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces* was rejected as an academic thesis. Significantly, however, apart from its inconsistency with the contemporary state of knowledge, Kant's work was turned down also because it was full of mistakes, and more speculative in its character than mathematical.¹²³

Schönfeld points to another significant factor underscoring Kant's failure: “[i]nquiring too deeply about the forces of nature might eventually question religious authority and its doctrines. Hence academics and intellectuals, especially those schooled in theology, had problems with the philosophical upshot of [Kant's] dynamics.”¹²⁴ Due to the Church pressure, numerous proponents of the dynamic view of physics were expelled from universities, sometimes also from their home towns. Such was the fate of Kant's initial sources of inspiration: Christian Wolff (1679-1754) and Georg Bernhard Bilfinger (1693-1750). Kepler's dynamics of the celestial bodies was marginalized, as was Leibniz's notion of the dynamic plenum, and its Wolffian modification known as *nexus rerum*, the idea of an interconnected whole. The rejection of Kant's work confirms the eighteenth-century bias against a dynamic vision of nature.¹²⁵

Apart from scarce scientific proof, the dynamic perspective was undermined also because it threatened the Christian dogma of Almighty and Omniscient God. The strongest opposition came from Pietists, a Lutheran movement whose increasing influence in Prussia

122 Schönfeld, “Kant’s Early Dynamics,” 33.

123 Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, 89; Schönfeld, “Kant’s Early Dynamics,” 40-43.

124 Schönfeld, “Kant’s Early Dynamics,” 34.

125 Ibid., 34-36; Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, 25.

coincided with the beginning of Kant's scholarly career.¹²⁶ Pietists, who put emphasis on the Christian dogma of a unique deity, predestination, and a static world ordained by Omniscient God, opposed the idea of self-ordering natural energy generating a dynamic network of things, *nexus rerum*, in which the body and the soul could both derive from its dynamic activity. They viewed the post-Leibnizian metaphysics as subversive and blasphemous because it questioned the Biblical dualism between immortal souls and mortal flesh. The other consequence of the dynamic line of thought unacceptable to Pietists was that none of its supporters could respect the tenet that only humans have souls, in contrast to animals. In the eighteenth-century, due to the support of King Frederick the Great, Pietists dominated the Prussian academia, limiting freedom of thought, fighting Leibniz's view of the world as a harmonized series of changes, and banning Wolff's post-Leibnizian dynamism.¹²⁷

According to Schönfeld, the other reason for eradicating Wolff was his declared admiration of the Chinese culture:

Wolff had even likened his dynamic ideas to those of the heathen Chinese. He argued that the normative thrust of moral action toward the good in the sphere of humans parallels the energetic thrust of natural processes toward harmony in the evolving cosmos. When he found the same view in the Confucian classics, he announced a match between his insights and those of Confucius (1721). Now the Christians had had enough. They went on the warpath, which resulted in a purge and Wolff's exile. The implications of dynamics were subversive. They were pagan threats in need of suppression.¹²⁸

A possible reason for the failure of Kant's *Estimation of Living Forces* was because instead of condemning Leibniz and Wolff along the Pietist doctrine, he exposed their views, indirectly supporting the idea of a harmonious universe of interacting forces, matter and

126 Allen W. Wood, "Kant's Life and Works," in Bird, *A Companion to Kant*, 12.

127 Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, 34-40; see, Richard L. Gawthrop, *Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth-Century Prussia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 128-139.

128 Schönfeld, "Kant's Early Dynamics," 34.

space. Schönfeld argues that “Knutzen criticized Leibniz and Wolff for having been too radical, but Kant criticized Leibniz and Wolff for not having been radical enough.”¹²⁹ Consequently, Kant's work was rejected, and he himself dropped out from the university, eventually leaving Königsberg without a degree. He came back to the city after a six-year absence.¹³⁰

Kant almost ended his philosophical career because of his non-conformist views. It is worth mentioning that a substantial part of his inspiration derived from philosophers either directly or indirectly drawing upon the dialectical approach of the Far East. Apart from Leibniz, whose pre-established harmony echoed the Taoist view of nature as a harmonious process, and Christian Wolff, who explored links between the Leibnizian dynamism as well as the Confucian praise for development through constant change, Kant's major early inspiration was Georg Bernhard Bilfinger, a Wolffian orientalist interested in Confucian dialectics. Kant claimed to be particularly impressed by Bilfinger's idea that a harmony of opposites is the path to truth. Originally stationed in Tübingen, in 1725, Bilfinger escaped Pietist persecutions and fled to Russia, where he joined the expatriate Leibnizian society in St. Petersburg, making his name as an expert on Chinese thought. He investigated the Confucian idea of natural harmony, the metaphysics of the Tao, and the idea of harmony between humanity and nature. Following the Confucian idea that difference is a symptom of change, Bilfinger claimed that the essence of force is a cooperation of opposites. Contradiction was for Bilfinger the cause of action. It seems that Kant was mostly impressed by Bilfinger's analysis of the Chinese idea of the middle way:

I don't know if I have been lucky with this way of reasoning elsewhere, but in the dispute over living forces I hope to be so. Never before was the world more equally divided into certain opinions as in those about the dynamic measure of moving bodies. In all regards, the parties are equally strong and equally justified. Of course, ulterior motives can always enter [into a dispute], but of which party

¹²⁹ Ibid., 36.

¹³⁰ Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, 94, 98.

should one say that it be entirely free of this? Thus I choose the safest route, by adopting a view that accounts for either of the two great parties.¹³¹

The idea of the middle way is prevalent in *Living Forces*. Schönfeld argues that the “middle way guides Kant’s estimation of force and is his schema for negotiating contradictions in general.”¹³² Although Kant’s ideas were innovative, they did not accord with the spirit of his time, therefore, after the failure of *Living Forces*, Kant abandoned his investigations into natural sciences, devoting himself to philosophical analysis of cognition, metaphysics, and ethics. However, he never discarded them entirely; having completed his *Critique*, he returned to physics in a work called *Opus postumum*. He died before finishing it.

Although initially rejected, mainly due to its discord with Newtonian physics, Kant’s harmony of opposites, his idea of the dynamic composition of matter, and especially his force field theories have been proven accurate by the ensuing discoveries in physics, chemistry, and ecology. Amazingly, by employing the notion of *nexus rerum* to explain his idea of the world as “the series of all simultaneously and successively existing contingent things that are connected with each other,”¹³³ Kant predated the modern understanding of nature, defined in ecology as an interconnected whole of individual constituents. His idea of a stretching force which transforms void into space and matter correlates with the twentieth-century hypothesis of cosmic expansion, the superstring and M-theories, and it partially anticipates Einstein’s general relativity. As argues Schönfeld, after Kant’s death, science returned to dynamics because Newton’s model did not explain all the aspects of the physical universe; in particular, Newtonian mechanics proved incorrect on the subatomic scale. Thus the return to dynamics, vindicating in hindsight Kant’s idea that force, space,

131 Immanuel Kant, *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces*, trans. Jeffrey B. Edwards and Martin Schönfeld, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Natural Science*, ed. Eric Watkins (1749; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 32.

132 Schönfeld, “Kant’s Early Dynamics,” 44.

133 Kant, *Living Forces*, 23.

and matter are mutually deterministic. Schönfeld is explicit about the praise due to Kant:

Einstein's discovery that mass and spacetime inform one another confirmed Kant's force-space bond. For Einstein, mass tells spacetime how to curve, spacetime tells mass how to move, and each is relative to the other. When Kant argued that interaction determines gravity, and that gravity determines structure, he put Newton on his Einsteinian head.¹³⁴

Schönfeld further elaborates on this issue:

Kant suspected that [...] the dynamic action of force points via gravity to the structure of space, even if that meant he had to distort Newton. Only Kant anticipated Einstein.¹³⁵

The paradox of Kant's early work is that it was rejected as obsolete and blasphemous, whereas his general intuitions were so far ahead of his time that they sounded absurd to Kant's contemporaries. According to Schönfeld, Kant's innovativeness can be assigned to his exposition to the Chinese concepts of the middle way, dialectics, and harmony of opposites: “the middle way reigns supreme in *Living Forces* [underlying] Kant's estimation of force and is his schema for negotiating contradictions in general [...] as well as his force-space bond.”¹³⁶ It can also be argued that Kant's harmonious coordination of opposites guides the whole of his *Critique*: his theory of reason unites empiricism with rationalism; in his ethical considerations, he coordinates transcendental laws of morality with the laws of nature; whereas in aesthetics, he looks for a middle way between the good, the right, and the beautiful. He bridged free will, obligation, and external duty. Although skeptical about animal subjectivity, Kant still advised to treat animals with respect. Similar ideas underlie the Tao metaphysics and Confucian ethics. Kant was most probably unaware of these parallels, and he openly disparaged Chinese culture, therefore, as Schönfeld remarks, “it is an irony that one of the West's greatest thinkers was first

¹³⁴ Schönfeld, “Kant's Early Dynamics,” 43.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 44.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

inspired by the Tao of the East.”¹³⁷

3.7. Coetzee's Harmony of Opposites

Coetzee draws upon the dialectical idea of the harmony of opposites throughout his work both by granting independence to the other and by providing discursive space for its own voice, without subduing it to Western narrative paradigms.¹³⁸ While advocating for the marginalized, underprivileged, and abused, he allows narrative room for the perpetrators, passive observers, and people who contribute to others' plight not necessarily because of spite or bad will, but, more likely, out of fear, ignorance, or opportunism. Moreover, he presents his ideological opponents with respect and seriousness; his criticism is not intended to ridicule, but to test their ideas by encouraging dialogue and comprehensive introspection into their inconsistencies and limitations. It could be argued that Coetzee's dialectical juxtaposition of various points of view is an expression of his effort to “awaken the countervoices.”¹³⁹

An aspect of Coetzee's dialectics is his absconding from the position of authorial power. In *Slow Man*, Paul Rayment opposes Elizabeth Costello, a stand-in for Coetzee, criticizing her inquisitiveness:

You treat me like a puppet [...]. You treat everyone like a puppet. You make up stories and bully us into playing them out for you. You should open a puppet theatre, or a zoo. There must be plenty of old zoos for sale, now that they have fallen out of fashion. Buy one, and put us in cages with our names on them. [...] Rows and rows of cages holding the people who have, as you put it, come to you in the course of your career as a liar and fabulator. You could charge admission. [...] Parents could bring their children at weekends to gawp at us and throw peanuts. Easier than writing books that no one reads.¹⁴⁰

137 Ibid., 45.

138 Cf. Sławomir Masłoń, *Père-Versions of the Truth: Novels of J. M. Coetzee* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2007), 9.

139 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 65.

140 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Slow Man* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2005), 117.

By depicting Costello, an author figure, as an oppressor, not as a sympathetic writer, Coetzee testifies to his own self-criticism and openness to other points of view, even to those he does not support.

An aspect of Coetzee's self-subjugation to scrutiny is Costello's inconsistency. On the one hand, she criticizes the exploitation of animals, on the other hand, however, she wears leather and, at times, she appears to be in favor of hunting and bull fighting, claiming that "there remains something attractive about [them] at an ethical level."¹⁴¹ Costello reproaches herself for her inconsistencies, but she is reluctant to renounce them. President Garrard, one of the organizers of the event at which Costello speaks, defends her by arguing that "[c]onsistency is the hobgoblin of small minds."¹⁴² He refers to the following idea of the American poet and thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882):

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day. [...] Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood.¹⁴³

Emerson does not criticize consistency; rather, he maintains that innovative ideas frequently seem mistaken not because they are wrong, but because they exceed the existing paradigms of thought and feeling. It could be argued that Garrard considers Costello as one of the visionaries who broaden the horizons of knowledge and moral sensitivity even at the cost of their own credibility.¹⁴⁴

Costello's self-contradictions can be explained by referring to Alasdair MacIntyre (b.

¹⁴¹ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 52.

¹⁴² Ibid., 44.

¹⁴³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Basic Readings in U.S. Democracy*, ed. Melvin Irving Urofsky (Washington: United States Information Agency, 1994), 96.

¹⁴⁴ See Alan Richard Northover, *J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy*, (PhD diss., Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2009), 158, <http://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/24686/00front.pdf?sequence=1>.

1929), a Scottish political philosopher who, in his 1981 study *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Philosophy*, argues that a situation, traditions, family, and history always influence what people do and think; the influence occurs mostly beyond their control and consciousness. When the circumstances change, so do people's views, which for those unaware of the change in the context may seem like a failure of consistency. In order to avoid such a misunderstanding, one needs to consider change and inconsistency as part of a bigger and harmonious picture. MacIntyre's approach to inconsistency resonates both with the type of dialecticism advocated by Nisbett and with Coetzee's openness to other voices.¹⁴⁵

It can be claimed that Coetzee presents Costello as an “intermediary between opposites,”¹⁴⁶ that is, as advocating dialogue with those who disagree with her, although she is not always enthusiastic about their views. According to Mike Marais, a Rhodes University scholar, the reason for Coetzee's adaptation of the dialectical approach is to avert the danger of dominating and to eradicate the other by failing to respect its alterity.¹⁴⁷ As already noted, apart from giving voice to the victims of social oppression, Coetzee allows narrative room for the culprits and the beneficiaries of such oppression, among them Eugene Dawn, Elizabeth Curren, and David Lurie. As for *The Lives of Animals*, despite its aim of promoting animal ethics, the novella is narrated from the perspective of John Bernard, Costello's son, who seems rather unsympathetic for animals:

[...] you won't get a bunch of Australians standing around a sheep, listening to its silly baa, writing poems against it. Isn't that what is so suspect in the whole animal-rights business: that it has to ride on the back of pensive gorillas and sexy jaguars and huggable pandas because the real objects of its concern, chickens and pigs, to say nothing of white rats or prawns, are not newsworthy?¹⁴⁸

145 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (1981; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 222.

146 Lucy Graham, “Textual Transvestism: The Female Voices in J. M. Coetzee,” in *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of a Public Intellectual*, ed. Jane Poyner (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 225.

147 Mike Marais, “The Possibility of Ethical Action: J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*,” *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 5, no. 1 (June 2000): 59.

148 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 55.

John's trivialization of the pro-animal movement reveals not only his ignorance of what his mother tries to say, but also a lack of sensitivity to animal suffering. It also testifies to the failure of his imagination. While occasionally sympathetic for Costello, he is similar to his wife, Norma, who openly dislikes her mother-in-law.

Importantly, despite her speciesist views, Norma is presented as a strong character whose strength is demonstrated in the following extract:

[R]ationality is not just, as your mother claims, a game. Reason provides us with real knowledge of the real world. It has been tested, and it works. You are a physicist. You ought to know.¹⁴⁹

In the above passage, Coetzee presents a convincing argument for rationalism, despite his own condemnation of reason as the unquestionable basis of all meaning and value. What he achieves by presenting Norma's arguments, however strong they may be, is the assurance that opposites can co-exist as long as they are independent and eager to respect one another.

Another strong voice in *The Lives of Animals* belongs to Abraham Stern, a fictional poet who absents himself from the dinner with Costello out of his feeling insulted by her views. Significantly, he informs about his withdrawal in a letter, thus granting his stance the authority of a written word. It could be claimed that he resorts to the means which Coetzee, an author conveying his ideas through writing, trusts the most. Despite their diverging attitudes, Coetzee acknowledges Stern as a serious and powerful representative of anthropocentric humanism.

Arguably, the most radical voice in *The Lives of Animals* belongs to Thomas O'Hearne, a fictional philosopher, at times identified with Vicky Hearne (1946-2001), an animal rights activist and philosopher,¹⁵⁰ although he is more likely to stand for Michael P.

149 Ibid., 48.

150 Ian Hacking, "Our Fellow Animals," review of *The Lives of Animals*, by J. M. Coetzee, and of *Ethics*

T. Leahy, an American critic of the animal rights movement, author of the 1991 study entitled *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective*, deemed to be the antithesis to Peter Singer's seminal *Animal Liberation*. Among O'Hearne's claims, the most radical seems to be the idea that animal rights are man's authoritarian imposition on animals, similar to the human rights movement, becoming "yet another Western crusade against the rest of the world, claiming universality for what are simply its own standards."¹⁵¹ According to O'Hearne, the horror of animal death is an instance of people's anthropocentric, "very Western, and even very Anglo-Saxon"¹⁵² view of animals:

To animals, death is continuous with life. It is only among certain very imaginative human beings that one encounters a horror of dying so acute that they then project it onto other beings, including animals.¹⁵³

Costello recognizes the above argumentation as accurate. Yet she discards O'Hearne's other claims; she particularly objects to his support for laboratory tests on animals, observing that such research is reductionist and inconclusive. She eventually refuses O'Hearne's ideas of humane slaughter of animals and of hunters' community with wildlife.

When O'Hearne speaks of humane slaughter, or when he defends hunting as a means of collecting food and preserving traditional lifestyle, he proves ignorant of the realities of modern slaughterhouses, factory farming, milk farms, and events like hunting safaris in Africa for the rich from the developed world. It is not Costello who is naive and misinformed; it is O'Hearne who has apparently not verified the empirical realities of animal exploration. Lacking confirmation in real life, O'Hearne's stance is abstract and redundant. However, Coetzee references O'Hearne's ideas to approved academic sources so that the readers of *The Lives of Animals* can check themselves the views of the critics of

into Action: Henry Spira and the Animal Rights Movement, by Peter Singer, *The New York Review* (June 29, 2000): 24.

¹⁵¹ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 60.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 64.

the pro-animal movement. Coetzee allows his ideological opposition a due voice, consideration, and a serious treatment.

Coetzee's idiosyncratic reinterpretations of Albert Camus's story of a hen, narrated in Camus's 1957 essay entitled "Reflections on the Guillotine," and of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" can also be perceived as an attempt at inviting multiple perspectives and unconventional modes of thinking. It could be argued that by advancing his own interpretation of canonical texts, Coetzee "challenges authoritative interpretations and provokes readers to listen to the polyphony of voices in great works of literature,"¹⁵⁴ destabilizing complacent certainties and encouraging a critical rethinking of the binding thought paradigms.

An aspect of the encouragement is that apart from Coetzee's two "Lessons," *The Lives of Animals* is composed of five other essays by various authors. While some of the essays provide philosophical or empirical support for the ideas expressed by Coetzee, others are critical, if not entirely condemning. That Coetzee allows for opposite views testifies to his dialectical approach to the animal rights discourse. The most critical essay is by Peter Singer who designates reason rather than sympathy and imagination as the basis for establishing reliable animal ethics. Although they differ on the role of rationality, Coetzee acknowledges Singer, confirming his notion of a dialectical juxtaposition of ideological opposites.

In addition to the "Reflections," Coetzee's dialectical harmony of opposites can also be identified in the variety of sources which he references in the text and in the footnotes of *The Lives of Animals*. He mentions both his ideological allies and opponents. The polyphonic character of the debate is stimulated by references to the philosopher Thomas Nagel and to the cornucopian denialist of animal rights Michael P. T. Leahy. There are mentions of such pro-animal activists as John Berger, Mary Midgley, Peter Singer, Paola

¹⁵⁴ Northover, *J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights*, 163.

Cavalieri, and Gary F. Francione. Coetzee refers to poets and writers, among them William Blake, Rainer Maria Rilke, Ted Hughes, D. H. Lawrence, Franz Kafka, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. There are also references to scientists: the literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, the historian of science Paul Davies, and the primatologist Barbara Smuts. Coetzee's use of these sources is dialogical because each of the authors referenced is invoked as an independent voice, neither favored nor trivialized, significantly enriching the novella's diversity of approaches.¹⁵⁵

The inclusion of contrasting voices may be misinterpreted as Coetzee's self-contradiction, escapism, or even plagiarism. According to Michael Bell, a University of Wisconsin-Madison scholar, Costello “unwittingly plagiarizes the very writers she excoriates.”¹⁵⁶ However, the aim of introducing multiple viewpoints is to prompt a dialectical debate encouraging the readers to consider the discussed issues on their own. As a further means of stimulating the debate, Coetzee does not allow any of his characters to dominate his work, even Costello. When she compares Kafka to Red Peter, Norma interrupts the narrative with “a sigh of exasperation,”¹⁵⁷ snorts, and continual criticism. No voice is thus privileged, which not only prevents monologue, but it also conforms to what Nisbett calls a dialogue of contradictions, thus improving rather than diminishing understanding.

Coetzee explains his choice of dialectics as follows: “[w]hat dialogism means is, at a technical level, that you don’t write from the position of one who knows the answer. That would be, so to speak, to write in a monologue or monologically. In other words, writing dialogically means writing in a manner which respects the knowledge of all who participate in the fiction.”¹⁵⁸ He also refers to the Bakhtinian notion of polyphonic novel

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 108.

¹⁵⁶ Michael Bell, “What is it Like to be Nonracist: Costello and Coetzee on the Lives of Animals and Men,” in *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of a Public Intellectual*, ed. Jane Poyner (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 176.

¹⁵⁷ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 32.

¹⁵⁸ John Maxwell Coetzee, “The Sympathetic Imagination: A Conversation with J. M. Coetzee,” by

when defining the ground for his use of multiple voices:

Again, bear in mind that monologue is not necessarily monological, if I understand Bakhtin. Nor is dialogue dialogical. There's a certain kind of monologue in which various voices are evoked and contested and played with that is part of the dialogical. So if I'm interested in monologue, it's not just at a formal level. On the other hand, it's not at the level of whatever it is Bakhtin is talking about, which, I suspect, is finally a religious level.¹⁵⁹

What Coetzee finds particularly convincing in Bakhtin's theory is his emphasis on the complementarity of opposing voices, without designating any of them as dominant.¹⁶⁰

Coetzee engages in dialogue with his adversaries also by creating conflict in his novella. Next to the animosity between Costello and her daughter-in-law Norma, there is tension between Norma and her husband John, and between Costello and John. The conflicts are mostly repressed, and they usually appear through the characters' passivity. Examples include John's silencing of Norma during their discussion following his mother's lecture, and his own inaction when Costello prompts him to support her with one of the questions from the audience. While Norma is critical of Costello, John is ignorant or at least ambivalent of his mother's ideas.

There also seems to be a conflict between Coetzee and his Costello persona. Apart from exposing her to O'Hearne's criticism, he ridicules her, distancing himself from her views. Coetzee's mockery of Costello can be seen when he makes her speak of rebellious rats which "haven't surrendered. They fight back. They form underground units in our sewers. They aren't winning, but they aren't losing either."¹⁶¹ Another instance of the mockery is when Coetzee calls his persona a "paid entertainer."¹⁶² Richard Alan

Eleanor Wachtel, *Brick: A Literary Journal* 67 (2001): 44.

159 Joanna Scott, "Voice and Trajectory: An Interview with J. M. Coetzee," *Salmagundi: A Quarterly of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, no. 114/115 (Spring-Summer 1997): 89, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40548963>.

160 Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 30-31.

161 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 59.

162 *Ibid.*, 41.

Northover, a scholar of the University of South Africa, Pretoria, argues as follows:

The idea of a paid entertainer also trivialises the seriousness of her [Costello's] message. Perhaps Coetzee is implicitly criticising both her audience as well as readers who read his work merely for the pleasure but remain untouched by it ethically.¹⁶³

In contrast to Coetzee's subtle and balanced voice, heard in his public speeches, critical writings, and interviews, the voice of Costello is emotional, at times offensive, and even hysterical. By juxtaposing the Holocaust with eating meat, she antagonizes her audience, spoiling the primary purpose of her lecture, which is to sensitize people to animal suffering. Her hostile conclusion of the argument with O'Hearne also damages her credibility; it is an uncontrolled rant, not a poised argument. Although she is Coetzee's mouthpiece, by exposing her drawbacks, Coetzee takes distance to the ideas he himself supports, thus avoiding the uncritical categoricalness of Western reason.

Verifying his own stance, Coetzee seems to engage in a dialogue with the philosophical tradition he is embedded in, namely that of treating reason as the only normative center of meaning and moral worth. By multiplying countervoices, he questions the categorical view of reason, and replaces it with a dialectical one, arguing for the need of supplementing reason with paralogical modes of thinking, especially imagination and sentiment. Like Kant, he attempts to awaken people from their “dogmatic slumber”¹⁶⁴ with regard to the suffering of animals. To achieve this, one needs to consider various points of view on equal basis, refute the idea of infallible reason, and approach rationality from a position of paralogy, that is, a viewpoint which Lyotard perceived as refining rationality with non-rational modes of cognition.

The tenet of Coetzee's dialectics with reference to animals is that he does not reject

¹⁶³ Northover, *J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights*, 144.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. Lewis White Beck (1783; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), 5.

reason itself but the idea of its dogmatic infallibility. Through the dialectics of *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee exceeds the norms of self-sufficient rationalism, and he strives for a harmonious exchange of ideas, leading to one's humanistic improvement as well as to successful animal ethics. The purpose of the extended rationality could be referred to as a harmonious inclusion of animal ethics into general ethics.

Conclusion

In the twentieth century, there has been an observable return to Kant's ideas both in natural sciences and in humanities. Although Kant's specific explanations are mostly spurious, it can be argued that the increased interest in his thought is due to his general argument for reconciling the opposites, his notion of a harmonious dialectic, and his openness to concepts exceeding the prevailing paradigms. The tenet of the present dissertation is that Coetzee's views inscribe into the return to the Kantian ideals. Over two hundred years of the Western civilization after Kant's death have confirmed the dynamic constitution of nature, and that uncertainty, change, and reciprocal determinacy define both the physical universe and the world of interpersonal relations. Kant's mediation between opposite worldviews, his favor for the reconciliatory theories, and the influence of Chinese culture on his thought validate Kant's idea of mutual dependency on a global scale. Coetzee's extended view of rationalism can be considered as contributing to that validation. In particular, Coetzee encourages to recognize the non-logical part of thinking, thus not only following the tenets of contemporary psychology, but also reflecting the paralogical holism of Chinese thought. To gain a full picture of Coetzee's critique of rationalism, it is necessary to discuss his other works.

Chapter IV

Critique of Rationalism in the Novels of John Maxwell Coetzee

According to Kant, neither empiricism nor pure rationalism suffice as the foundation of certain knowledge; to achieve such a certainty, suprasensual experience should be included in the cognitive scope of reason. Kant theorized the inclusion in “Transcendental Dialecticism,” which forms a part of his first *Critique*. Similarly to Kant, Coetzee argues for an incorporation of the non-rational experience into the rationalistic discourse. The tenet of Coetzee's argument is to criticize both the perception of reason as an absolute faculty and favoring rationality over other modes of cognition, including imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, emotions, and will. The aim of the present chapter is an analysis of Coetzee's major works in terms of his critique of the instrumentalist vision of reason and its use in justifying the abuse of the less powerful members of the society. The ensuing study discusses the racist, sexist, academic, and speciesist rationalities, reflecting Coetzee's investigation into the Western bias against alterity, both human and non-human.

4.1. Coetzee's “Fictionalized Memoir”

While Coetzee depicts reason's “vast tautology”¹ mostly in *The Lives of Animals*, it is possible to pinpoint some elements of the critique in a number of his other novels. In his fictionalized memoir, a series of three quasi-biographical novels, *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2002), and *Summertime* (2009), Coetzee describes a life-long process of liberating himself from his own self-indulging rationalizations. Unlike most autobiographers,

1 John Maxwell Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 25.

Coetzee does not present himself in a positive light. In *Boyhood*, he shows himself as a young Europhile ashamed of his South African roots who strives to camouflage his minority complex by excelling at school and developing a strong interest in European literature. In particular, he identifies with Englishness, considering it the equivalent of spiritual and cultural sophistication. In *Youth*, he describes his first years on emigration in London. Working as a computer programmer, Coetzee grows bored and disillusioned with English life style. In his free time, he tries to write poetry but his literary attempts are disappointing. The main cause for the disappointment is his puerile fascination with literature; young Coetzee idealizes famous men of letters, among them Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Ford Maddox Ford, whom he tries to emulate, however without any success. Only when he discovers Samuel Beckett does he realize that his admiration for Europe and Britishness is superficial and caricatural. Following the discovery, he soon learns to accept his South African background and use it as an asset in his writing.

Coetzee presents his young self blinded by the shame of being a South African, but he also describes his slow recovery from the complex. The reasons for the improvement are not a rational calculation but the aesthetic purity of Beckett's verse. What he finds liberating is Beckett's inattention to pre-conceived ideas and his uninhibited approach to the rules of logic, custom, and even to literary canons. Coetzee realizes how naive and pretentious his rationalizations are, that his attachment to rules and canons is not only alienating but also limiting to the development of his creativity. Due to Beckett, young Coetzee discards unreachable ideals, discovering the potential of his own background. He gradually learns that the South African upbringing can help him discover his own voice and become an original writer. Consequently, he abandons his career as a computer programmer and proceeds to write his first novel. The career change can be interpreted as a metaphor for leaving the order of analytical reason and entering the realm of paralogical

creativity. He also engages in literary criticism. Coetzee grows to appreciate his provinciality and to treat his South African past as an advantage enabling him to write without the grandiosity of Western self-importance.²

In his fictionalized memoir, Coetzee adapts his biography in order to expose ill uses of rationalization on his own example. He recalls his youthful attraction to academia, revealing that he engaged in scholarly research not out of the want to develop his knowledge, but rather because he strived for recognition as an academic scholar. Coetzee demonstrates that, with enough effort, reason can be used to falsify truth, not only before others but also before oneself. Considering his preference for things British, Coetzee admits to deceiving mainly himself, and that the aim of the deception was to dissimulate his South African complex of inferiority. By disclosing the perversity of his own rationalizations, Coetzee demonstrates that reason can serve a means to manipulation and self-deceit. In his first works, however, the novelist demonstrates that the West has frequently employed rationalism to justify its colonial violence.

4.2. *Dusklands*

In “The Vietnam Project,” the first part of his 1974 narrative *Dusklands*, Coetzee presents a character named Eugene Dawn, a clerk working for the U.S. Department of Defense, who immerses himself in excessive rationalism and eventually suffers a nervous breakdown. Out of his sense of duty, Dawn spends hours researching American propaganda in Vietnam, he neglects his family, and when he experiences health problems, he considers his body an obstacle to the task. As his psychic condition deteriorates, he abducts and hurts his son, because of which he is arrested and retained for a psychiatric

² Sławomir Masłoń, *Coetzee: Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej* [Coetzee: A Guidebook by Krytyka Polityczna] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2009), 10-11, 18-19.

treatment. However, even at this point, his rationalism does not subside; closed in a mental asylum, he eagerly participates in the treatment, believing that methodological and rationally ordained work will make him recover: “I approve of the exercise of exploring the self. I am deeply interested in my self. I should like to see in black and white an explanation of this disturbed and disturbing act of mine.”³ Dawn does not abandon his rationalism; instead, he continues to “ponder and ponder,”⁴ and the only relief from his overactive *ego* comes when he falls asleep. He fears being irrational but, paradoxically, it is his overdeveloped rationalism that makes him lose his senses. Accordingly, by exposing the paradoxes of Dawn's conduct, Coetzee pictures reason's “vast tautology” in an acute and almost literary manner.

Coetzee further ironizes about reason's self-serving bias in “The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee,” the second narrative of *Dusklands*, in which he presents an eighteenth-century explorer of South Africa who justifies his brutality to the natives with a self-proclaimed “civilizing mission.”⁵ The explorer, titular Jacobus Coetzee, excuses his cruelties with a historic necessity, disregarding the aborigines' dissent against being civilized by foreigners. Martin Woessner, a scholar of The City College of New York, claims that for Jacobus Coetzee “reason is [...] the cornerstone of a vicious ideology of power and domination,”⁶ a mere pretext for brutal conquest and subjugation, motivated mostly by avarice and imperial want of land. Reason is used to justify colonialism by rationalizing cruelty as morally acceptable. According to Peter McDonald, an Oxford University scholar, Coetzee's exposes the faults of Western reason by presenting Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee as “pathological rationalists”⁷ who fail to recognize others as ends in

3 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Dusklands* (1974; London: Vintage, 2004), 46.

4 Coetzee, *Dusklands*, 49.

5 Ibid., 111.

6 Martin Woessner, “Coetzee's Critique of Reason,” in *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics: Philosophical Perspectives on Literature*, ed. Anton Leist and Peter Singer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 232.

7 Peter D. McDonald, *The Literature Police* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 307.

themselves due to their immersion in the Cartesian solipsism. Both Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee are unitary selves, disturbed, rather than assisted by their self-righteous rationalism.

4.3. *In the Heart of the Country*

Coetzee displays the illusory nature of self-fashioned rationalizations in his 1977 novel *In the Heart of the Country*. The novel can be treated as a continuation to the criticism of the Afrikaner pastoralism begun in *A Story of an African Farm* (1883) by Olive Schreiner, a nineteenth-century South African novelist. In her novel, Schreiner rejected the romanticized vision of South African farm, and by presenting it as a place of moral and social decay, she commenced the process of demythologizing its role in forming the Afrikaner identity. Schreiner demonstrated that the colonial ideals underlying the Boer society, such as the mission to civilize aborigines or the idea of cultivating land for man's prosperity, had become corrupt with people prolongedly living in the hostile environment of South Africa. Schreiner showed that Boers had succumbed to sloth, apathy, and indifference not only because of difficult conditions but mainly due to their detachment from the cultural centers of the West. She also presented them as neglecting their agricultural duties.

The novel features elements of free-thought and feminism, and there are references to sex outside marriage and extramarital pregnancy. Because of its subversive themes, Schreiner's novel scandalized numerous conservative circles in her country; she was also frequently criticized by Afrikaner nationalists. However, the greatest controversy was caused by her caricature of *plaasroman*, a characteristically Afrikaner type of pastoral writing deemed as the repository and cornerstone of the Afrikaner identity. Using the

genre to question Boer values, especially during the height of Afrikaner struggle for recognition as a separate nation, was interpreted as provocation and an act of antinational dissent.⁸

Throughout the novel, Coetzee develops on Schreiner's criticism of the rationalizations distributed by Boer nationalists through the *plaasroman* romanticization of Boer values and the rural style of life. Similarly to Schreiner, he depicts a detached farm disturbed by the death of its male owner. The decease is sudden, and it undermines the patriarchal structure of the farm, leaving Magda, the daughter of the deceased, as the only inheritor of the property. As a woman, brought up in the *plaasroman* spirit of the Afrikaner patriarchy, she is unprepared to retain the male-based power relations established by her father. She does not know how to conduct agricultural works. Seeking help, she summons Henrik and his wife Anna, former black workers, naively hoping that they will recognize her as their superior because of her being a white. Instead, she is raped by Henrik and, eventually, left alone on the farm, unable to run it by herself.

While the farm deteriorates, Magda develops mental illness. Suffering from recurring hallucinations, she finds it difficult to differentiate between imagination and reality. She talks to herself in lengthy and nonsensical monologues. At some point, she mentions killing her father. On the one hand, she may be raving, on the other hand, however, she may be telling truth, her motive being a wish to liberate herself from her abusive father. She might have felt disrespected by his promiscuity, objectification of women, and his disregard for her as a person. Significantly, they had never talked with each other, closed in their Cartesian solipsistic egos, externally projected as self-sustainable but internally fractured and confused. It could also be claimed that Magda's guilt is evinced by her exaggerated mourning; it is noteworthy that her grief bears marks of self-pity, rather than

8 John Maxwell Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 63-81.

pain after the deceased.

Another possible cause of the distress is her inability to exceed the patriarchal character of Afrikaner identity, according to which women's fate is decided by men, either their fathers or husbands. Accordingly, when her father dies, Magda is lost, her identity disintegrates, and she is not respected. She becomes a victim of the paradigm that defines her social status with reference to man; her tragedy is that she cannot overcome the paradigm on her own. The extent of her predicament is further exposed by the fact that her mindset is based on the rationalizations provided by colonial reason and propagated through the *plaasroman* type of pastoralism. Admittedly, Magda struggles because of her ambiguous identity which, in the view of Teresa Dovey, a lecturer at the University of Technology at Sydney, further exposes the Cartesian rationalist's inability "to transcend the endless duality of the intrasubjective imagery relationship of self to self,"⁹ detectable in Magda's recurring assertion "I am I."¹⁰

According to Dovey, the unsure ontological standing of Magda results from her desire for reciprocity, which also characterizes Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee:

[w]hile they articulate a strong desire for a reciprocal speech from the victims of colonization and of apartheid, they do not imagine that they can fabricate, in a facile way, a cross-cultural dialogue within their own structures: they recognize that, if this kind of dialogue does ensue, it will have to be a product of their reception.¹¹

Magda projects her own discursive space but she gets lost in it because of her overdue rationalism. According to Hilmar Heister, a scholar at the Humboldt University of Berlin, her alternating periods of self-assertion and self-doubt liken Magda to the character of a wise fool from *In Praise of Folly*, Desiderius Erasmus's 1511 satire on self-deception,

9 Teresa Dovey, "J. M. Coetzee: Writing in the Middle Voice," in *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Sue Kossew (New York: Hall, 1998), 23.

10 John Maxwell Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country: A Novel* (1977; New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 5.

11 Dovey, "J. M. Coetzee: Writing in the Middle Voice," 27.

hypocrisy, and superficial morality.¹²

Magda is aware of the fictional nature of the paradigm in which she dwells: “I make it all up in order that it shall make me up.”¹³ Although the death of Magda’s father means an end to the patriarchal rationality, seemingly liberating her from the paradigm of female subjugation, she persists in it because she does not know any other mode of existence. According to Brian Macaskill, a John Carroll University scholar, Magda occupies “a middle locution between active and passive,”¹⁴ thus resisting the rationality of hierarchical dichotomies, whether colonial or patriarchal. However, unable to exceed the dichotomies, she only destabilizes her own position. Macaskill’s view is shared by Chiara Briganti, a scholar at King’s College London, who claims that Magda is “engaged in a masquerade that enables her to parody the male gaze and those images that are seen culturally through men’s eyes,”¹⁵ yet her engagement is futile, leading to the death of her father, and later to her own collapse. Admittedly, Magda stays on the farm not because she has nowhere else to go, but rather because she cannot think of any other place she could inhabit. She is incapacitated by the patriarchal paradigm of the social group she belongs to.

Magda’s predicament is due to the limitedness of her perspective. Depicting her failure, Coetzee criticizes those who persist with their faulty modes of thinking, even at the cost of personal harm. The group he most likely refers to are the proponents of self-righteous rationalism who refuse to engage with alterity by disregarding other modes of perception. Accordingly, Coetzee reveals the inconsistencies of absolutist rationality by describing its implication in abusing the powerless and the marginalized, whether in the

12 Hilmar Heister, “The Sympathetic Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee: Empathy and Mirror Neurons in Literature” (PhD diss., Humboldt University of Berlin, 2015), 56, <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/dissertationen/heister-hilmar-2015-03-17/PDF/heister.pdf>; cf. John Maxwell Coetzee, “Erasmus: Madness and Rivalry,” in *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 83-103.

13 Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country*, 80.

14 Brian Macaskill, “Charting J. M. Coetzee’s Middle Voice: *In the Heart of the Country*,” in Kossew, *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee*, 77.

15 Chiara Briganti, “‘A Bored Spinster with a Locked Diary’: The Politics of Hysteria in *In the Heart of the Country*,” in Kossew, *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee*, 86-87.

colonial or patriarchal framework.¹⁶

4.4. *Waiting for the Barbarians*

A full display of Coetzee's critique of imperial rationality ensues in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), a story of a settlement located at the outskirts of an undefined Empire, disturbed by a series of military deployments from the country's capital. The titular barbarians are nomadic tribes who inhabit a vast wasteland spreading beyond the borders of the Empire.¹⁷ They are scattered and mostly peaceful. However, the commander of the deployment, Colonel Joll, spreads rumors about their preparation to wage war against the Empire. After arriving at the fort, he begins to torture randomly detained nomads, searching for details about their future attacks. The hearings are exceptionally brutal; the interviewed sustain severe injuries, and a number of them die. Apart from being cruel, Joll is adamant about rationalizing his investigative methods as necessary for the safety of the state. The purpose of his rationalization is to legitimize his claim for power; as it later turns out, Colonel Joll starts his bloody hearings to simulate the barbarian threat and then to establish his position of power by projecting himself as the protector of the Empire. In this sense, the barbarians are victims of an instrumentalist rationality which designates the weaker and less privileged as a means to an end, not as an end in itself.

While Joll's recourse to the order of reason is a mere pretense, the unnamed narrator of the novel, the Magistrate, who is also the administrator of the fort, employs reason to pursue his quasi scientific hobbies. For him, rational politics means keeping peace between the fort people and the nomads, sustaining cross-border trade, and upholding the *status quo* of the present regime. He is little interested in the power struggle at the center of the

16 Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 45-48.

17 Originally capitalized by Coetzee.

imperial hierarchy, represented by the Third Bureau. Isolated at the outskirts of the Empire, the Magistrate keeps himself occupied with hunting, reading the classics, and occasionally drawing maps of unknown lands. One of his frequent hobbies is archeology; he excavates ruins of ancient civilizations and spends his free time deciphering their languages. The Magistrate's complacent life is disturbed by Joll's arrival at the fort and the ensuing state of emergency.

For fear of permanently losing his privileges, the Magistrate does not risk an open conflict with the Colonel; he hopes that acquiescence will guarantee him at least part of his former comforts. He rationalizes the escalating brutality of the hearings by claiming that Joll is looking for truth. However, despite his initial passivity, the Magistrate soon confronts the Colonel about the legitimacy of his methods; he doubts whether prolonged suffering helps the purpose of the investigation. The Magistrate asks Joll the ensuing question:

What if your prisoner is telling the truth [...] yet finds he is not believed? Is that not a terrible position? Imagine: to be prepared to yield, to yield, to have nothing more to yield, to be broken, yet to be pressed to yield more! And what a responsibility for the interrogator! How do you ever know when a man has told you the truth?¹⁸

Provoked, the Colonel replies with what sounds like a threat: “[p]ain is truth; all else is subject to doubt.”¹⁹ Joll is determined to harm in order to advance in the imperial hierarchy of power. By exposing Joll's motives, Coetzee demonstrates the immorality of instrumentalist rationality, especially in its colonial inflection, and those who follow its logic.

The reasoning of the Magistrate is also morally questionable. He tolerates Joll to prevent political upheaval at the price of the nomads' torment. As the Magistrate argues, he

¹⁸ John Maxwell Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980; London: Vintage Books, 2004), 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

decides for the sacrifice because he believes that the state of emergency is periodical, and that the torture will soon terminate. The belief is based on his knowledge of similar barbarian crises in the past:

In private I observed that once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians. There is no woman living along the frontier who has not dreamed of a dark barbarian hand coming from under the bed to grip her ankle, no man who has not frightened himself with visions of the barbarians carousing in his home, breaking the plates, setting fire to the curtains, raping his daughters.²⁰

The Magistrate is not surprised by the barbarian hysteria. The question is what causes its periodical reoccurrences, and how much it has to do with real barbarians.

The solution to the riddle of the barbarian threat can be found in the text that most probably inspired Coetzee's work, that is, Constantine P. Cavafy's 1904 poem "Waiting for the Barbarians." In the poem, Constantine P. Cavafy (1863-1933), a modern Greek poet, presents an empire put in a state of emergency by an expected arrival of barbarians; people gather in the forum, the senate stops its proceedings, and there is an atmosphere of excitement and lively commotion. Referring to the barbarians, Cavafy writes that "those people [are] a kind of solution,"²¹ implying that the barbarian threat is used to legitimize the empire's existence: the empire is projected as a protection against the barbarians. Both in Cavafy's poem and in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the barbarians could then be perceived as an embodiment of the instrumentalist rationality of imperialism; they are used to justify the imperial claim for power, goods, and workforce. The captive nomads in *Waiting for the Barbarians* are not real enemies; they are only projected as enemies to fulfill the Empire's need of self-legitimization. It can be argued that they stand for the projected Other in relation to which the West justified its imperialism.²²

20 Ibid., 9.

21 Constantine P. Cavafy, "Waiting for the Barbarians," *Collected Poems*, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, ed. George Savidis, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 19. The poem is also attached in the appendix to the dissertation.

22 See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 2-3, 21, 48, 76, 327.

Drawing upon Cavafy, it can be argued that any state becomes redundant once the others in relation to which it has defined its existence fail to show up. As Cavafy demonstrates in his poem, without barbarians, there is no-one to be protected, consequently, the empire is not needed, nor are its structures and elites. Coetzee elaborates on Cavafy's ideas and demonstrates that, in case of lack of real dangers, the other can be invented and projected as an actual threat. The projection can be limited to symbolic gestures, such as assembling troops, declaring emergency, and supplying the public with suggestive imagery and simplified rationalizations. This is exactly what Joll does. Since there is not any confirmed danger of war, he evokes and then reinforces people's fear of barbarians by publicly demonstrating random nomads as bloodthirsty enemies:

The Colonel steps forward. Stooping over each prisoner in turn he rubs a handful of dust into his naked back and writes a word with a stick of charcoal. I read the words upside down: ENEMY... ENEMY... ENEMY... ENEMY. He steps back and folds his hands. At a distance of no more than twenty paces he and I contemplate each other.²³

Joll provokes “the patriotic bloodlust” to legitimize his claim to power as a defender of the Empire, and judging by the enthusiastic reaction of the people, he seems successful.

Paradoxically, Colonel Joll depends on the barbarians; as argues Dominic Head, a University of Nottingham scholar, Joll is deprived of other means of influencing his fate, therefore, he “needs to discover barbarians to validate his mission and the existence of Empire.”²⁴ More evidence from literary criticism confirms that Colonel Joll “is dependent on others [the barbarians] in that that he only exists by exercising his dominance over them. The exercise can assume various forms: verbal assertion, social dominance and quasi-parental instruction. He does not find a sense in and for himself otherwise.”²⁵

²³ Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 115.

²⁴ Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee*, 49-50.

²⁵ Krzysztof Kowalczyk-Twarowski, *Ravishing Interiors, Frontiers of Light: On the Novels of J. M. Coetzee* (Ustroń: Innowacje, 2002), 24.

Admittedly, the barbarians do not pose a threat but they offer an opportunity for people like Joll to gain power. The real obstacle is the Magistrate, a representative of the so-called “old families”²⁶ and a supporter of sustaining friendly relations with the nomads. Therefore, Joll uses the barbarian threat not only to demonstrate himself as an able leader, but also to present the Magistrate's rule as inept and dangerous to the security of the state.

Joll's attacks culminate after the Magistrate's expedition to the barbarian territory. Together with Mandel, another security official from the capital, Joll accuses the Magistrate of “treasonously consorting with the enemy,”²⁷ subsequently imprisoning the Magistrate without trial. The Magistrate defends himself in the ensuing manner: “[we] are at peace here, [...] we have no enemies. [...] Unless I make a mistake [...]. Unless we are the enemy.”²⁸ In the above quote, Coetzee implies that the struggle between the Magistrate and Colonel Joll reflects a clash between the current rulers of the Empire and those who strive to replace them. The Magistrate is well aware of the internal dynamics of the state he serves; reflecting on Joll's motivations, he admits that he finds it “hard to hate him in return. The road to the top must be hard for young men without money, without patronage, with the barest of schooling, men who might as easily go into lives of crime as into the service of the Empire.”²⁹ The barbarian threat is confirmed as a pretext for re-establishing the rule in the country, meaning the Magistrate's compliance is only provisional.

The Magistrate does not concede to Joll and Mandel. On the contrary, he undermines their rule whenever possible. At the beginning, he limits himself to small acts of defiance; he shows concern to a mutilated boy, trying to console a tortured family and, during the warden's absence, he releases his prisoners and opens the gates of the town to stimulate trade with the nomads. Later in the plot, while translating the ancient scripts engraved on

26 Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 90.

27 Ibid., 85.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 92.

the poplar slices found in the archeological excavations around the fort, he indirectly threatens Joll. Although the Magistrate does not know the language of the scripts, he acts as if he did and, pretending that he conveys some old wisdom, he expresses his severe criticism of the Colonel:

Now let us see what the next one says. See, there is only a single character. It is the barbarian character for war, but it has other senses too. It can stand for vengeance, and, if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read justice. There is no knowing which sense is intended. That is part of barbarian cunning.³⁰

Joll does not know the objective truth of the Magistrate's translation. He cannot tell whether his position is indeed being questioned, therefore, he is unable to defend it and to punish the Magistrate for his possible defiance. Joll's authority has been undermined by allowing his adversary to control the power discourse in which they both dwell. In a sense, the Magistrate presents himself as the reasoning master; he does not hold power itself, but he controls the rationale of power distribution.

Having gained a symbolic advantage, the Magistrate eventually contests Joll in public. During a public beating of some captive nomads, the Magistrate accuses Joll of cruelty and manipulation, calling him a barbarian:

Those pitiable prisoners you brought in-are *they* the enemy I must fear? Is that what you say? *You* are the enemy, Colonel! [...] *You* are the enemy, *you* have made the war, and *you* have given them all the martyrs they need-starting not now but a year ago when you committed your first filthy barbarities here!³¹

Joll and the warrant officer Mandel almost kill the Magistrate for the insult. The reason why they eventually spare his life is because the Magistrate represents the imperial ethos which they want to master, not eradicate; getting rid of the Magistrate would designate them as opponents of the imperial rationality, thus foreclosing their access to power.

³⁰ Ibid., 122.

³¹ Ibid., 125 (emphasis original).

Therefore, striving to enter the authority structure rather than dystroy it, Joll and Mandel need to make the authority representatives, among them the Magistrate, transfer their power onto them.

Another way in which the Magistrate opposes the new regime is by taking care of a barbarian girl maimed by Joll during his investigations. She was made to watch her father being tortured to death, then her eyes were scorched with a hot metal, and she was severely beaten all over her body. Having been physically deformed, she has lost her sense of subjectivity, which is why she is indifferent and “yields to everything.”³² To rebuild her sense of human dignity, she needs help from someone who would take interest in her feelings, in her present self, without expecting anything from her. In other words, she needs to be loved, and the Magistrate seems to behave like her lover. Not only does he provide her with food, housing and occupation, but he also asks her about her past. He is preoccupied with her feelings, spending ample time on washing her body. Despite his tenderness, however, the Magistrate denies loving the barbarian girl, only later revealing that “it is the marks on her which drew [him] to her.”³³ He is not interested in her physically, nor in helping her to overcome her trauma, but in the wounds Joll left on her body. It can hence be argued the Magistrate's true fascination is the visiting warden's methods of gaining power, not the barbarian girl.³⁴

Coetzee evokes the Magistrate's preoccupation with Joll already in their first encounter by means of a phallic reference: they are seated at a table on which there is a standing flask and a bowl of nuts. Later in the novel, when the Magistrate and Joll meet again, the flask is lying and the bowl is empty. Coetzee may be using this symbolic castration to mark the Magistrate's failure at understanding Joll's strategy. His limited

32 Ibid., 32.

33 Ibid., 70.

34 Sławomir Masłoń, *Père-Versions of the Truth: Novels of J. M. Coetzee* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2007), 20.

insight is also evoked when he looks into Joll's face but cannot see his eyes because of the Colonel's black glasses. With this type of symbolism, Coetzee demonstrates that poor sympathy may result in a deficient understanding of others.

The Magistrate's scant sympathy surfaces also in his relation to the barbarian girl. Admittedly, when he takes care of her, he concentrates on the technical aspects of her suffering; he is interested solely in her wounds, how she received them, and whether they still hurt. For the Magistrate, it is not the woman that is important but her perpetrator; he asks about Joll's methods of torture, his words and behavior during her hearing. He seems to think that the wounds on her body are a script containing knowledge about Joll and his real purpose in the fort. It could be argued that, by tending the girl, the Magistrate strives to read the script, little minding if the girl approves of it. His inconsideration for the girl's feelings resembles the ruthlessness of Joll's instrumentalist rationalism.³⁵

During their encounters, the Magistrate is ignorant of the barbarian girl's personal experience. Like Joll, he approaches the barbarian girl as an object of techno-scientific scrutiny; his examination is detailed, and it is based on a belief in the all-encompassing power of reason. In a quasi-scientific manner, he tries to decipher the marks on her skin. However, his attempts are futile, both because of his limited sympathy for the barbarian girl's suffering and a depersonalizing treatment of her body. According to Mike Marais, the cause of the Magistrate's failure to engage with the girl is his particularized rationalism:

What is adumbrated in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, then, is a form of ethical action that is not grounded in the perceptions, experiences, and understanding of a rational, autonomous individual. Very clearly, this novel treats knowledge and reason with the utmost suspicion. Knowledge, that which invests the rational subject with a sense of control of both world and self, is always local and therefore generates rather than grasps otherness. It can only ever attempt to comprehend others by integrating them into the knowing subject's priorly formed

35 Cf. *ibid.*, 20.

conceptual system.³⁶

Not only does the Magistrate fail to comprehend the barbarian girl, but he also gets confused about his own dual feelings about her: “[there] is no link I can define between her womanhood and my desire. I cannot even say for sure that I desire her. All this erotic behavior of mine is indirect: I prowls about her, touching her face, caressing her body, without entering her or finding the urge to do so.”³⁷ He seems lost due to relying exclusively on rationalistic disquisition while neglecting emotionality: “never before have I had the feeling of not living my own life on my own term.”³⁸ His rationality also fails when he tries to conceive of his moral change and the causes of his developing sympathy for the barbarian girl: “I am with her not for whatever raptures she may promise or yield but for other reasons, which remain obscure to me as ever.”³⁹ Designating the Magistrate’s “intuitions are clearly fallible,”⁴⁰ Coetzee demonstrates that a purely analytical inquiry does not suffice to understand the other; it does not suffice to understand oneself either.

The inefficiency of reason is particularly visible during the daily washing sessions. The Magistrate would take the barbarian girl to his room and perform a strange ritual during which he would wash her body, massaging it and rubbing with oils, and finally bandaging her wounds. On the one hand, the ritual could be interpreted as the Magistrate’s way of redressing the damage done to the barbarian girl during Joll’s hearings. On the other hand, however, it could be a symptom of his subconscious will to expiate for his secret fascination with Joll and Mandel. The Magistrate might also desire to earn the girl’s trust so that she would allow his scrutiny to last longer. Furthermore, he could be making a martyr of himself, taking blame for the abuses done to the barbarian girl in the name of the

36 Mike Marais, “*Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980),” in *A Companion to the Works of J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Tim Mehigan (Rochester: Camden House, 2011), 72.

37 Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 46.

38 Ibid., 43.

39 Ibid., 70.

40 Ibid.

Empire, thus confirming his right to represent it. However, the only result of his efforts is a failure of his conscious mind; at the end of each session, the Magistrate loses consciousness, recovering only some hours later. While unaware, he has dreams about deformed figures resembling the barbarian girl. Both the uncontrollable fainting and nightmares might be interpreted as Coetzee's way of symbolizing the failure of the Magistrate's reason to approximate the other.

In particular, the Magistrate misunderstands the real meaning of the barbarian girl's wounds; he fails to comprehend that intense physical pain can destroy one's sense of human subjectivity, that is, in order to prevent pain, the afflicted person will yield to anything that the perpetrator demands, even to denying his/her sense of self-worth. The Magistrate does not comprehend this truth because he concentrates solely on the girl's wounds and not on herself. Consequently, by being interested solely in her body, not only does the Magistrate objectify the barbarian girl, but he also conforms with Joll. Coetzee demonstrates that emotionless, purely analytical insight into torture means marginalizing the victim and placing the oppressor in the center of attention. The Magistrate's rationalism exerts as much violence to the barbarian girl as does Joll's torture: both the Magistrate and Joll negate her human subjectivity by violating her physical and personal integrity.⁴¹

The barbarian girl resists the Magistrate in the same way she resists Joll. Despite his attempts, the Magistrate does not manage to categorize her; it is symbolized by his subconscious reason's inability to give the girl a concrete shape in his dreams. She remains an enigma, infuriating her self-proclaimed caretaker. Frustrated, he decides to take her to the barbarian territory and leave her with the first nomads they will encounter. The Magistrate does not ask the barbarian girl if she would like to leave the fort. Instead, he decides for her, thus imposing on her the identity of a refugee. The imposition is reflected

41 Masloń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 29.

in the Magistrate's dream in which the girl appears not as a shapeless embryo, as she did in his former dreams, but as a fully formed person. He has no problems depicting her because he has adjusted her to his thought paradigm, disregarding her consent. Here, Coetzee exposes the brutality of reason's demand to categorize. Like Sultan, or Red Peter, the barbarian girl suffers due to being forced into the rationalistic discourse.⁴²

Paradoxically, the moment of the Magistrate's greatest insensitivity is when he seems to be the most sympathetic to the barbarian girl. After showing her to the encountered nomads, he asks her to come back with him out of her own will. The request could be interpreted as a sign of affection, possibly love, yet considering that the barbarian girl's free will has been destroyed during the torture, it is a sign of his ignorance. The other possible interpretation of the offer could be that the Magistrate wants to save his image of a compassionate liberal before himself. Despite denying it, he does realize his similarity to Joll, especially in disregarding the girl's feelings. In the following excerpt, the Magistrate admits to his own falsity:

she is marked for life as the property of a stranger [Joll], and no one will approach her save in the spirit of lugubrious sensual pity that she detected and rejected in me. No wonder she fell asleep so often, no wonder she was happier peeling vegetables than in my bed! From the moment my steps paused and I stood before her at the barracks gate she must have felt a miasma of deceit closing about her: envy, pity, cruelty all masquerading as desire. And in my lovemaking not impulse but the laborious denial of impulse!⁴³

The Magistrate takes custody of the barbarian girl not because he wants to help her, but because he projects himself as "a barbarian lover,"⁴⁴ a decent liberal ready to sacrifice himself for the Empire's good, and as one who deserves to rule due to his sense of justice and unflinching commitment to law and order. Clearly, then, in his dealings with the

42 Cf. Judie Newman, "Intertextuality, Power and Danger: *Waiting for the Barbarians* as a Dirty Story," in Kossew, *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee*, 134.

43 Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 148.

44 Ibid., 136.

barbarian girl, the Magistrate is motivated by selfishness and, similarly to Joll, by a want of power.⁴⁵

There is also a kind of similarity between the Magistrate and the barbarian girl. The arrival of Joll at the fort means a considerable debasement of their status. They have also been hurt by him and his militaries. It could hence be argued that the Magistrate sympathizes with the barbarian girl owing to their similarity, which could in turn mean that he actually sympathizes with himself. Because of the comparability, the Magistrate may see in the barbarian girl his mirror image, thus again, his sympathy for her could be a form of his self-pity. Admittedly, by projecting himself as a compassionate and righteous ruler who opposes Joll's atrocities, the Magistrate in fact indulges in a "perversive fascination with himself."⁴⁶ His decision to interrupt the public beating of Joll's captives can be explained as an act of such self-oriented propaganda.

The victim of his narcissism is the barbarian girl. One of his lovers informs him of how he has made the girl suffer: "[s]he said you were somewhere else. She could not understand you. She did not know what you wanted from her. [...] Sometimes she would cry and cry and cry. You made her very unhappy. Did you know that?"⁴⁷ Since the Magistrate does not answer the question directly, it could be claimed that he was aware of the barbarian girl's discomfort in the fort, which is probably why he decides to put himself at danger and help her find her people in the wild. Admittedly, considering that in the barbarian territory there is no public in front of which he could pretend to be benevolent, the reason for going to such lengths with her is most probably because he wants to save his image of his idealized self solely for himself. He is likewise motivated when offering her a return to the fort out of her own will.

As already argued, by taking the barbarian girl beyond the Empire, the Magistrate

⁴⁵ Masloń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 25.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁷ Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 166.

manages to exert his symbolic domination over her by categorizing her as a refugee. During the trip, he attempts to do the same with her body by forcing her to have sex with him. The girl does not oppose because her will has already been broken by Joll. Again, despite divergent interests, the Magistrate and Joll emerge as parallel figures. Moreover, by linking a conceptual categorization with an act of sexual abuse, Coetzee demonstrates that violence is frequently concomitant with rationalistic justification. First, the barbarian girl is exposed to the imperial reason of Joll and the Magistrate. Then, she is abused by both of them. Finally, she is abandoned with stranger nomads. In a sense, by defining the barbarian girl according to his worldview, the Magistrate has achieved his goal, that is, he has established his power over the other. Having done so, he is ready to face Joll, which he does during the public beating.

Having returned from the barbarian territory, the Magistrate is accused of espionage, named traitor, and imprisoned without trial. During the incarceration, he suffers malnutrition; he is humiliated and hurt by Joll and Mandel. On one occasion, however, he escapes, but instead of seeking refuge or waiting for his oppressor to leave, he exposes himself by interrupting Joll and Mandel's public torture of the captive nomads. The Magistrate is punished by being severely beaten; he is also humiliated by being forced to wear a female petticoat in public. Eventually, he is hung half-naked on a tree, and although he does not die, he nonetheless suffers further humiliation, losing his credibility as a ruler. Consequently, instead of strengthening his position, the Magistrate is defeated by Joll, who can now enjoy an unlimited power in the fort.

In the hanging scene, Coetzee criticizes reason by making the Magistrate's reasoning laughable, not in the sense that it is based on wrong assumptions, but because he has underestimated his bodily limitations. The Magistrate is a caricature of a pure rationalist who deems bodily experience redundant; he opposes real-life torture naively believing that

mere preaching about humanistic ideals will stop the violence. Moreover, through a direct exposure to bodily harm, the Magistrate finally begins to understand the meaning of the barbarian girl's wounds. According to Woessner, the meaning can be put in the following words: "[p]ain transforms the Cartesian *cogito* into pure body [which] swallows the rational self, crowds and overtakes it,"⁴⁸ thus destroying one's humanity. The Magistrate learns about reason's vulnerability to pain not through thought experiments but, as Costello would argue, literally, that is, by being personally affected by extreme bodily harm. When maltreated, the Magistrate abandons his techno-analytic approach to torture and, unlike Eugene Dawn, he does not try to rationalize it. Instead, he concentrates on satisfying basic bodily needs, he struggles to control his somatic reactions, and as his speech becomes hardly intelligible, he toils to make himself understandable. In a sense, he constitutes a living proof of Costello's claim that rationalistic argumentation, when confronted with severe physical affliction, turns into a mere "gabble of reason."⁴⁹

Elaine Scarry (b. 1946), a Harvard University professor, seems to provide an explanation for the Magistrate's linguistic difficulties. In her 1985 study *The Body in Pain*, she examines the Amnesty International collection of testimonies delivered by victims of torture, and she concludes that severe pain significantly impairs rational expression, frequently reducing it to monosyllabic cries and whispers. Through the Magistrate's debasement, Coetzee demonstrates that the limit of reason is the body, and if this fact is ignored, reason is condemned to ridicule. Admittedly, the Magistrate is no longer the reasoning master. Rather, swinging on a branch and wearing a petticoat, he resembles a clown.⁵⁰

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, brutality is justified with a quest for knowledge, or as

48 Woessner, "Coetzee's Critique of Reason," 234.

49 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 26.

50 Elizabeth Irene Smith, "The Body in Pain: An Interview with Elaine Scarry," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 32, no. 2 (September 2006): 224; cf. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

the Magistrate puts it, to find out “the truth,” and similarly to Scarry's argument, the search is characterized by a systematic and almost unemotional approach to suffering. People are methodically afflicted with pain because harm is thought to yield knowledge and, as Joll argues, it guarantees safety and a peaceful rule. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, the founders of the Frankfurt School of Social Research, argued in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) that such a rationalization of suffering is inhumane, resulting in diminishing human civilization, rather than in its improvement. In their view, the contemporary brutalization of the Western culture originated in the Enlightenment emphasis on scientific rationalism, leading to a mechanization of research and a materialist approach to knowledge. Horkheimer and Adorno argued that the technicization of knowledge had led humanity to “sink into a new kind of barbarism,”⁵¹ epitomized in the twentieth century by fascism, the Holocaust, and what Adorno referred to as “culture industry,”⁵² that is, the post-war commercialization of culture and the subsequent decline of its humanistic ideals. Mechanistic rationalization of life not only results in indifference to the other's suffering, but it also diminishes personal culture. As Coetzee demonstrates in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, it may also negate people's critical reflection, thus impairing their sympathy and the ability of altruistic devotion to the other.

The weakness of Western rationalizations is also demonstrated by Coetzee through Joll's defeat. The warden's forces are depleted because he is besotted by his rationalization of the impending war. He projects the barbarian attack as a massive onslaught, therefore, he gets prepared for a direct combat. Yet he never confronts a barbarian army; instead, his forces are defeated by the barbarians' guerrilla tactics. Joll loses because guerrilla fighting exceeds his idea of war; his failure is thus due to his ignorance of other modes of thinking,

51 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (1944; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), xiv.

52 Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 322.

among them the non-imperial idea of warfare. In consequence, he has to withdraw to the capital, seeking refuge. By showing Joll's defeat, not only does Coetzee draw attention to the limits of self-righteous rationalism, but he also encourages to consider other thought paradigms, thus propagating the ideas of tolerance and sympathy for alterity.⁵³

Coetzee introduces a positive note in the last scene of the novel, in which he observes a few children building a snowman. It strikes him that the snowman will have no arms, but he stops himself from interfering and ordering the kids to attach arms. Eventually, he is surprised to admit that it "is not a bad snowman."⁵⁴ In this powerful scene, Coetzee shows that the Magistrate has learnt to refrain from projecting his own rationalizations on others, and that imposition of one's own thought paradigms is a form of violence. Although it seems rational for him that the snowman should have arms, he realizes that for the children a snowman with arms may look ridiculous, and he does not interfere with them. He "leaves it feeling stupid," where "it" could be interpreted as the Magistrate's idea of reason.

When the Magistrate decides not to intervene about the snowman, he opposes the rationalizations he lives in. He rebels against them, yet the nature of his rebellion is specific because it takes the form of inaction. However, while he resolves to "press on along a way that may lead nowhere,"⁵⁵ letting things take their natural course, his passivity is not the same as the passivity of the barbarian girl. Unlike her, he does not "yield to everything." On the contrary, when the Magistrate decides not to act, he in fact pauses to reflect on his position; he concentrates, experiencing a moment of pensive insight in the surrounding reality. Unlike the barbarian girl, he does not succumb to the dominating thought paradigm, but he opposes it through doubt and thoughtful deliberation. It could be argued that he symbolically rebels against the rationalizations foisted upon him through

⁵³ Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee*, 53.

⁵⁴ Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 170.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

custom and culture.

Considering the foregoing, Coetzee criticizes the attitude represented by Joll's captives who never stand up to the opposing system; they neither actively oppose Joll, nor do they develop any kind of passive resistance to him. They seem indifferent to what happens to them. The Magistrate, however, does oppose Joll from their first encounter. As already mentioned, he ignores his orders, questioning his authority in public, and he even removes the traces of his presence from the fort. In this sense, the Magistrate is an opposite of Michael K whose passivity and indifference to the surrounding world almost kill him.

4.5. Life and Times of Michael K

Michael K is in a similar position to that of the barbarian girl's. He lives in a hostile world, ravaged by a war in which he does not want to participate, and he spends most of his days searching for a place where he could separate himself from the ongoing hostilities. After a long and strenuous search, interrupted by the death of his mother, Anna K, Michael finally settles on a deserted estate, the Visagie farm, where he sets up his own garden. Unwilling to inhabit the household, he decides to occupy a nearby dugout. Despite initial difficulties, he manages to cultivate barren soil and grow a few vegetables. He hopes it will allow him to survive without suffering hunger. He seems comfortable in the solitude of the farm; when he dedicates himself to physical work, it does not matter that he is harelippe and orphaned, and his mental deficiencies become irrelevant. He feels safe living outside society, and nearly everything else that communal life entails, including custom, politics and interpersonal relations. In a way, he epitomizes the ideal of a "noble savage," introduced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), a Swiss Enlightenment philosopher and a political thinker, who propagated a return to "the state of nature,"⁵⁶ deeming it as the

56 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality*, ed. and trans. by Maurice Cranston (1755; London:

only remedy against the West's corruption of morals. Accordingly, Michael K visualizes himself as a natural creature, a mole or an earthworm, to which the detachment of the farm is the most suitable habitat.

Following Rousseau, Coetzee presents Western institutions as burdensome to Michael K. As in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the oppression comes from the prescriptions of law and order, state administration, institutions of public service, police, and army. Another source of K's misery are the emanations of Western reason; they involve politics, linear conception of time, conceptual language, and the emphasis on being active. K seeks the farm because its solitude offers a relief from them; he is not constrained by obligations to the state, he can live along the circle of seasons and there is no need of verbal language. However, while K is "not clever with words,"⁵⁷ he is still "full [of stories], but the words would not come."⁵⁸ Admittedly, K prefers to stay silent not because he has nothing to say but rather because the language within which he functions lacks proper means to convey his meanings without trivializing them. David Attwell, a University of York scholar, argues that K finds language oppressive, therefore, he refrains from it.⁵⁹

Similarly to the barbarian girl, K suffers from being forced into predetermined categories which he does not fit into and which put him in a position of inferiority. Because of the classifications demarcated by Western reason, he is perceived through his mental handicap, and consequently he is treated as a simpleton, if not entirely as a fool. One of the main charges against him is his unwillingness to participate in the political life of his country. Almost all the people he encounters convince him to take a stand on the ongoing war and engage in actions deemed meaningful within the Western frame of reference. Depending on the context, he is persuaded to work or to learn; the guerrilla

Penguin Classics, 1984), 78.

57 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983; London: Vintage Books, 2004), 48.

58 Ibid.

59 David Attwell, *J. M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 88-99.

fighters he meets in the mountains ask him to pick up guns and fight. During the meeting on a beach, when he is introduced to a group of prostitutes, he is encouraged to indulge in hedonistic pleasures, including alcohol and physical love. At all times, however, K feels discomforted. The cause of the discomfort is the precept of Western reason to classify people basing on what they do. K's behavior does not comply with the classifications, hence he feels oppressed whenever he is pressed to assign himself to any of them. The persuasion means violence to K because it forces him into categories that infringe upon his sense of freedom and right to self-constitution.

The symbol of the classifications imposed on K are the disciplinary institutions he is forced into. In his young age, K is sent to a special school for "afflicted and unfortunate children"⁶⁰; then he works as a gardener, and later as a night attendant at public lavatories. After the breakout of the civil war, he is detained in police custody; he is sent to the Jakkalsdrif labor camp, but he soon escapes it, and when he is captured again, he is assigned to the Kenilworth internment camp. Accordingly, education, hospitals, army, and other instruments of state control could be interpreted as materialistic representations of the limitations generated by Western reason. They are inflections of reason's dictate of utilitarian logic, systemic order, and paradigm of depersonalized discipline. Coetzee criticizes reason by exposing the oppressiveness of its regulations.

It is noteworthy that Coetzee's critique of reason draws upon the Foucauldian criticism of socialization through subordination to state institutions.⁶¹ The novelist evokes a link between reason's orderliness and apartheid's preoccupation with segregation. The setting of *Life and Times of Michael K* refers to the 1980s riots in South Africa provoked by the repressions introduced by the Afrikaner Nationalist Party to reinforce apartheid. The novel can thus be read as a story of an escape from the abuses of reason materialized

60 Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K*, 4.

61 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 128.

in the form of apartheid. Accordingly, by connoting apartheid with the Western emphasis on classification, Coetzee exposes the oppressiveness of instrumentalist rationalism and, to use the Lyotardian terminology, the associated hostility of analytical reason to paralogical modes of thinking. According to Anton Leist (b. 1947), a University of Zurich scholar, in *The Life and Times...* “[t]here are, in essence, two worlds coming into view: our everyday world of separation and time, words and power, and instrumental ends and means, and an alternative world, however vague, of amalgamation and presence, bodies and trance, self-forgetfulness and nondirected joy.”⁶² Similarly to Coetzee's other characters, in particular the barbarian girl and Elizabeth Costello, Michael K flees the rationalistic world of “ends and means,” while embodying the paralogical world of “amalgamation and presence.”

K suffers misrepresentation also by real-life people. Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014), a Nobel laureate in literature and an acclaimed literary critic, in her 1984 review of *Life and Times of Michael K*, “The Idea of Gardening,” argued that the titular protagonist is Coetzee’s artistic mistake due to his idleness and ignorance of the history happening around him. Although she finds Coetzee’s novel “a marvelous work that leaves nothing unsaid [...] about what human beings do to other human beings,”⁶³ she still refers to Michael K as a failed character “who denies the energy of the will to resist violence.”⁶⁴ In this way, Gordimer disregards that the essence of Michael K’s passivity is resistance to the Western emphasis on activity. As already argued, K avoids Western categorizations because he finds them limiting; therefore, when Gordimer criticizes him for inactivity, little minding his otherness, she unwittingly confirms his misgivings about Western modes of thinking. It could be claimed that Gordimer’s attitude is oppressive because it relegates K to a non-negotiable subordination to the order that he refuses to comply with.

62 Anton Leist, “Against Society, Against History, Against Reason,” in *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics: Philosophical Perspectives on Literature*, ed. Anton Leist and Peter Singer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 217-218.

63 Nadine Gordimer, “The Idea of Gardening,” *New York Review of Books* (February 2, 1984): 5, accessed April 22, 2016, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1984/02/02/the-idea-of-gardening/>.

64 *Ibid.*, 4.

By condemning K for his passivity, Gordimer evinces the type of violence that Köhler was guilty of, that is, the difficulty to approach otherness without subduing it to the predetermined categories of Western reason. A similar attitude is evinced by the medical officer of the Kenilworth camp in which Michael K is hospitalized. By referring to him as clown, “a wooden man,”⁶⁵ or a museum exhibit, the medical officer subjects K to the Western system of culturally significant classifications. And although he eventually sympathizes with Michael, his view of K along the camp nomenclature can still be compared with Gordimer’s criticism of K’s lack of political engagement.⁶⁶

Gordimer’s criticism of K’s insolence has a substantial colonial reference. As can be inferred from Jodocus. H. Hondius’s 1652 study, *A Clear Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, in order to justify their conquest of South Africa, the ancestors of today Afrikaners presented themselves as better users of the land than its native inhabitants, whom they frequently perceived as “dumb cattle [...] handicapped in their speech, clucking like turkey-cocks [...] who sleep in the savannah, men together with women. [...] A number of them will sleep together in the veld, making no difference between men and women. [...] They all stink fiercely, as can be noticed at a distance of more than twelve feet against the wind, and they also give the appearance of never having washed.”⁶⁷ There are similar references to the laziness of natives authored by other incoming European colonizers. In Raven-Hart’s collection of the descriptions of the first fifty years of the Cape Colony, there are a plenty of disparaging references to the aborigines’ indolence; they are often compared to animals, some of the explorers question their intelligence. There are also testimonies describing the natives’ tolerance of physical discomfort, negligence of hygiene and basic dietary needs.⁶⁸ In their 1785 report, *A Voyage to The Cape of Good Hope...*

65 Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K*, 149.

66 Cf. Heister, “The Sympathetic Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee,” 112.

67 Jodocus. H. Hondius, *A Clear Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, trans. L. C. van Oordt (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Festival Book Exhibition Committee, 1952), 26-28.

68 Rowland Raven-Hart, *Cape Good Hope 1652 – 1702: The First Fifty Years of Dutch Colonisation as Seen by the Callers* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1971), 1:22; 2:269, 432.

1772 – 1776, Anders Sparrman and Georg Forster describe natives as useless and unfamiliar with organized work. They are presented as helpless and self-destructive in their prolonged laziness.⁶⁹ In 1801, Christian F. Damberger describes Hottentots as “perhaps the laziest nation upon earth. [However] the women are very industrious in household affairs.”⁷⁰ Accordingly, colonialism in South Africa was justified with a condemnation of the native’s indolence, resulting from the Western praise for activity, protestant work ethics and the Enlightenment drive for development and expansion. In *White Writing* (1988), Coetzee deems such imperatives as the origin of the West’s propensity to combative conquest, epitomized throughout colonialism. Michael K evades the propensity by avoiding the power play of the anti-apartheid resistance. If he fought, as Gordimer would urge, he would follow the militant solutions used by the regime, thus indirectly supporting its hostile politics. Accordingly, when Michael K says that he is not “in the war,”⁷¹ not only does he avoid warfare, but he predominantly absents himself from the discourse of war. K’s idleness is in this respect not mere laziness; it rather means dissent from the oppressiveness of Western reason.

A symptom of the dissent is K’s attachment to the quietness of the farm. Taking care only of the garden, he realizes Rousseau’s ideal of coming back to nature, and at the same time he avoids the capitalistic imperative of mass production. He cares only about his own subsistence. When he does not cultivate his garden, he sleeps most of the time, he barely moves, and he is little concerned with the outside world. He retreats to a burrow dug next to the farmhouse to avoid interference from the surroundings, and also to protect himself from anyone who could force him to speak and talk about himself. K prefers silence

69 Anders Sparrman, *A Voyage to The Cape of Good Hope... 1772 – 1776*, ed. V. S. Forbes, trans. rev. J and I. Rudner (1785; Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1975), 209, <https://archive.org/stream/voyagetocapeofgo00spar#page/n5/mode/2up>.

70 Christian F. Damberger, *Travels in the Interior of Africa from the Cape Good Hope to Morocco, from the Years 1781 to 1797...* (London: T.N. Longman and O. Rees, 1801), 57-58, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951002325015q;view=1up;seq=85>.

71 Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K*, 138.

because he wants to remain invisible to the world; he does not wish to attract attention for fear of harm. His withdrawal from social life should be interpreted as an attempt at surviving in a world which he finds hostile, both because of its demeaning classifications and his estrangement from its utilitarian paradigm.⁷²

However, while Michael K thinks of the farm as a place where “one can live,”⁷³ it soon turns out that he lives a fantasy. The farm does not protect him from the evils of the external world; on the contrary, although he tries to be free, to grow his own vegetables, and to “live by the rising and setting of the sun, in a pocket outside time,”⁷⁴ his “freedom is defined [only] negatively,”⁷⁵ that is, he never becomes fully self-subsistent. When Michael is found by soldiers, he has almost starved himself to death living off his produce; he barely walks and remains conscious. He would perish but for the external help. The idea of living outside of civilization, reason, and social institutions is hence compromised. The farm turns out as dangerous as the external world. K falls victim to the Western romanticization of rural life, made out of nostalgia for peace and comfort, but hardly realizable in the real world.

Michael K’s belief that “perhaps the truth is that it is enough to be out of all camps at the same time”⁷⁶ turns out to be mere wishful thinking. Whether he means actual camps or metaphorical encampment by politics, custom, and rationality, there is no possibility of evading definition. One is always in a context, and as Wittgenstein argued, the context determines how one is perceived. Accordingly, K fails in his escape from being rationalized according to Western categories because the escape itself happens in a context, defining K either as a political escapist, or as a pastoral idealist, or as a pacifist. K is thus naive in his struggle against conceptual encampment, and the extent of his naivety

⁷² Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee*, 46.

⁷³ Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K*, 184.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁵ Gordimer, “The Idea of Gardening,” 5.

⁷⁶ Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K*, 182.

is further exposed by the fact that in *Life and Times*... “virtually everybody seems to be of Michael’s opinion that it is best to be out of all camps at the same time.”⁷⁷ Accordingly, the army deserter whom Michael meets at the farm claims that there “is a war going on, there are people dying. Well, I am in war with no one. I made my peace.”⁷⁸ A guard in the Jakkalsdrif detention camp tells Michael that “the day I get orders to go north [to the front] I walk out. They’ll never see me again. It’s not my war. Let them fight it, it’s their war.”⁷⁹ Likewise, all the military who run the camps, the medical officer that looks after Michael, and the commandant of the Kenilworth camp oppose warfare and wish for a peaceful life far from the ongoing events. Similarly to Michael, they fantasize about a better place to live, but unlike Michael, they do not realize the dream. They fail because they remain on the declarative level, without actually living the fantasy. As of Michael, his failure should be attributed to the abandonment of rational disquisition, evinced among others by his endorsement of the pastoral ideal.

While Coetzee does not extol reason, he nevertheless demonstrates what happens when reason is supplanted by non-rational modes of existence, such as Michael K’s animalistic preoccupation with bodily needs. By depicting K’s failure, Coetzee seems to argue that beyond reason there is emancipation, insanity, and eventually death. By abandoning rationality, Michael K approaches bestiality; he is dehumanized. Coetzee depicts K’s progressing dehumanization by showing him inhabit a burrow, bestially drown a goat for food, refrain from language and most of human wants, both spiritual and bodily. In addition to his reluctance to eat, he does not seem to wash, nor does he need a permanent abode. His emotional needs are also limited. Unlike the barbarian girl, he seems indifferent to love. He does not need friends; when the medical officer tries to befriend him, K shows no interest. It also seems that Michael has no need to be understood and

⁷⁷ Masloń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 41.

⁷⁸ Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K*, 64.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

sympathized with. It is noteworthy, however, that he does occasionally engage in blissful conversation; he helps a wounded soldier; and shows concern for those who gain his trust. Although K approaches the state of nature, as Rousseau would approve of, by abandoning rational disquisition, he almost literally disappears as a human being, diffusing into the environment, and nearly dying of emaciation.⁸⁰

However, K does rationalize, and he does it according to his needs. It is not certain whether the Visagie farm is the one he has been looking for, yet he settles down there, claiming it is his home. Inhabiting the first farm he likes, K rationalizes his worldview by way of accomplished facts. He also refers to symbolic gestures; he spills his mother's ashes to reinforce his right to the land. By implementing his ideas of origin and a return to home, he imposes his own discourse on the farm. Interestingly, K's behavior reminds of the methods used by colonizers who, upon entering a new land, claimed it as theirs by imposing on it their own discourse, ideas, and values, little minding the views of the conquered peoples. Similarly to Jacobus Coetzee, Michael K lives a fantasy, and it is the colonial fantasy of making an unused land usable. He validates the fantasy by the performative act of cultivating the land he occupies.

Moreover, K's behavior resembles Joll's. The Warden projects a barbarian threat, then he sets on a journey inside the enemy's territory where he is defeated not by the barbarians but by harsh conditions. Likewise, K settles down on the farm, believing that he will feed on its crop, but instead, he almost dies of emaciation. Both K and Joll become unduly attached to their own fantasies, they overestimate the efficiency of their rationalizations, undervaluing the objective reality within which they function. They are defeated by their excessive reliance on their own worldviews. In this regard, rather than criticizing reason, Coetzee exposes the detrimental effects of unreflective attachment to its self-conceived rationalizations.

80 Leist, "Against Society, Against History, Against Reason," 216.

Coetzee points to such detriments also in his audience. K's stay on the farm is frequently interpreted as a political statement: it propagates the philosophy of minimal subsistence. It is perceived as an allegory of Rousseau's ideal. Importantly, however, the allegory is not intended by Michael K. It is imposed by the Western reader familiar with the allegorizing function of literature. Therefore, to read K's story as an allegory is to rationalize him by forcing him in the Western conceptual framework. Such an enforcement means denial of his struggle against definition. In a sense, the reader is one of K's opponents from whom he flees. Consequently, reading, interpretation, and literary attempts at defining him ought to be perceived as oppressive to K. However, since it is impossible not to define Michael while reading *Life and Times...*, he always fails in confrontation with the reader. As a literary character, K must yield his meaning to exist as a phantasm of the reader's imagination. By evoking the correlation, Coetzee points to the cognitive limitations of audience, and to reason's inability to exceed such limitations.⁸¹

Considering the foregoing, it could be claimed that Coetzee makes Michael K fail at the farm to de-allegorize him, and in this way to avert his complete subordination to the order of Western reason. Michael does not inhabit the farmhouse, but he digs a hole in the ground and lives in it like a worm. He grows barely anything in his garden, and towards the end of his stay at the farm, the farmhouse is blown out, water pump destroyed and K's crop stolen. The pastoral allegory of sustainable life outside civilization embodied by Michael is thus negated in an almost literal sense. Such an approach to allegorizing literature is called postmodernist allegory, and it involves a mode of writing which both develops and questions the allegorizing impulse.⁸²

Paradoxically, Coetzee criticizes reason by compromising a character who evades rationalization. After entering the Visagie estate, Michael K imposes on it the Western

81 Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee*, 58.

82 Ibid., 48, 60.

idea of a farm, which he actualizes by sowing seeds, tending the plants, and finally harvesting on them. He validates his vision of the estate through performance. This is also what Joll does throughout *Waiting for the Barbarians* and what the Magistrate reflects on at its end. Coetzee argues that the narrative of reason, its constructs, fantasies, and rationalizations can easily get out of control; they can dominate the discourse, blurring the difference between facts and fantasy. In this sense, the novelist does not criticize reason for its impositions, nor for its limitations, but he rather demonstrates how rationalistic discourse complies with abuses of reason, even to the detriment of its creators. Similarly to Kant, Coetzee seems to argue that rationalism, coupled with the academic discourse, is an act of performative narration used to validate the ideas of reason, however abstract they may be.

Lives and Time of Michael K is Coetzee's first novel in which the author challenges the reader's vision of reading and writing, and their relation to the real world. He makes his audience reflect on their pre-conceived ideas, the illusions they choose to believe, and how they rationalize their fantasies. In a Kantian fashion, Coetzee makes his readers ponder on the origin and validity of their concepts as well as modes of thinking. It can be argued that for Coetzee reason is a narrative; it validates itself through stories. Eugene Dawn literally invents stories to validate the American propaganda about Vietnam; Magda from *In the Heart of the Country* abides by the *plaasroman* mythology, which is also what Michael K does, but his narrative seems to be more consistent; Joll projects the barbarian mystification to validate his claim to power. By showing these characters fail, Coetzee points to the limitedness of such narratives.

4.6. *Foe*

In *Foe* (1986), there are numerous references to Daniel Defoe, especially to *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Roxana* (1724), and a short story called “A True Revelation of the Apparition of One Mrs Veal” (1706). For most part, the novel is told from the perspective of Susan Barton; she lands on a desert island where she meets a castaway named Cruso (Coetzee’s spelling) and his black servant, Friday, presumably an African slave who had his tongue cut out in his youth.⁸³ Despite its similarity to *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee’s novel is devoid of colonial propaganda and the associated praise for work and development. On the contrary, Cruso remains ignorant of historical time; similarly to Michael K, he does not record its passage. Instead, he lives by the time of day and the changing of seasons. Another discrepancy between *Foe* and Defoe’s novel is that Friday is not native of the island; due to the black color of his skin, it can be inferred that he comes from Africa. Although not directly specified in the novel, it can also be argued that he is a slave whose ship was wrecked somewhere in the Caribbean; it appears that he survived the catastrophe with Cruso. The nature of their relationship is not explained but it seems that Cruso is a former slaver, and Friday was one of the slaves he was to trade in America. However, Cruso denies enslaving Friday; he claims to have saved him “from being roasted and devoured by his fellow-cannibals.”⁸⁴ Yet that cannot be true due to Friday’s African descent; he has also never attempted an escape, apparently treating Cruso as his authority. As of Cruso, he refers to Friday as his possession, which he reveals in the following passage: “Friday lost his tongue before he became mine.”⁸⁵

Considering that they have spent fifteen years on the island, and that Friday must have

83 Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee*, 62-63; Gayatri Spivak, “Theory in the Margin: Coetzee’s *Foe* Reading Defoe’s *Crusoe/Roxana*,” in *The Consequences of Theory*, ed. Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1991), 154-155.

84 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Foe* (1986; London: Penguin, 1987), 12.

85 *Ibid.*, 37.

been a child at the time of the shipwreck, it could be argued that Friday has been brought up to internalize his subjugation to Crusoe. One aspect of the upbringing could be muting Friday. Crusoe claims that Friday had his tongue cut out by “the slavers, who are Moors,”⁸⁶ but this explanation is inconsistent with his former claim that Friday was injured by cannibals. Whatever the reason for Friday's harm, Crusoe takes advantage of his speechlessness, among others by using it as a pretext for appointing himself as the master of the island. It is also noteworthy that Crusoe does not pity Friday for his handicap. On the contrary, he thinks it advantageous for him to be mute; he claims that the island “is not England, we have no need for a great stock of words.”⁸⁷ Crusoe behaves like a colonizer, focused only on himself, identifying his own good as the general good, and he lacks empathy for the other.

Crusoe uses his dominating position to realize his vision of a self-sustainable society. Throughout his stay on the island, he and Friday clear the forest, they till the soil preparing it for agriculture, and they fence off plots of arable land. However, the labor is useless because Crusoe has no seeds to sow and thus no crop to harvest upon. The effort is senseless also because there is enough natural vegetation on the island to provide food without growing crop. Accordingly, Crusoe is not motivated by real needs, but he rather strives to realize his self-ordained vision of a paradise on earth, a fantasy, which he resolves to uphold for imagined future visitors. As he argues, responding to Barton's criticism of his labour, “the planting is reserved for those who come after us and have the foresight to bring seed.”⁸⁸ Crusoe fantasizes about future comers to rationalize his pointless efforts.

Crusoe tills the land to provide his life with a sense of purpose, it being the comfort of the imagined newcomers. He thus follows the Kantian notion of *summum bonum*.

86 Ibid., 23.

87 Ibid., 21.

88 Ibid., 32.

Moreover, Crusoe follows Kant's logic of transcendental illusion; although the idea of future visitors is not empirically verifiable, he still retains it because it guarantees the consistency of his work-oriented mode of existence. His belief in the visitors also reminds of Kant's rational faith. Crusoe believes in their coming because the belief makes his work rationally justifiable. However, considering that wilderness may overrun his fields before anyone comes to the island and appreciates his efforts, it can be argued that Crusoe keeps himself occupied solely because of the idea of work instilled in him by Western work ethics. He complies with the Western paradigm because he was brought up in it and because it defines him as a Westerner. In this sense, it seems that the primary reason why Crusoe persists with the work is to differentiate himself from Friday, the non-Westerner whom he likens the more they live together.⁸⁹

Clearly, Friday is a joint figure of the barbarian girl and Michael K. His wounds result from another person's drive to supremacy; similarly to the barbarian girl, "Friday's body is just a support for a [colonial] fantasy projection."⁹⁰ The similarity to Michael K regards Friday's displacement; they are both strangers to the Western frame of reference. Unless they adjust, sacrificing their individual identities, they will always remain outcasts, misunderstood and brutally rejected. By likening Friday to the barbarian girl and Michael K, Coetzee exposes the violence of reason to subjects exceeding the framework of Western logics. Friday can thus be perceived as a paralogical figure whose suffering is both the result and proof of the conceptual limitedness of Western reason.

Coetzee also demonstrates that the Western pursuit of power frequently involves abuse of nature. Responding to Barton's encouragement to write down his adventures for posterity, Crusoe replies in the following manner: "I will leave behind my terraces and walls."⁹¹ Crusoe's agricultural endeavors are thus not entirely nonsensical. On the contrary,

⁸⁹ Cf. Masloń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 65-67.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁹¹ Coetzee, *Foe*, 8.

he tills the land not to grow crop but to leave on its surface marks of his overpowering presence. His tillage can be perceived as “a permanent cut in nature,”⁹² a way of subduing violence, and also a gesture of mastery which defines the land as his possession. Agriculture in *Foe* is thus presented as a type of writing, a language, that is to silence nature and at the same time to subdue it to the anthropocentric paradigm. It could be argued that Coetzee presents nature as a body on which the West projects and confirms its dominating position. Cruso’s island is then similar to the barbarian girl; their bodies are used to display the power of their masters.

Coetzee's views from *Foe* are confirmed by Alfred W. Crosby, the author of *Ecological Imperialism* (1986), who argues that political colonization and the contemporary conquest of nature have the same cause, that is, the West’s tendency to project itself and its modes of thinking as superior to non-rational ways of perceiving the world, and at the same time as the only reliable cognitive agency. The rationale of nature exploitation is in his view subject to similar difficulties as the justification for colonialism. Coetzee concentrates on the role of narration in creating and distributing such a rationale.⁹³

Coetzee refers to narration as a means for validating human dominance of nature also through Barton's attempts at describing her stay at Cruso's island. After being rescued and brought back to England, Barton sets out to write down her adventures. However, learning that she is not skilled enough at writing, she asks Foe, an established writer, and Coetzee’s *alter ego* for Daniel Defoe, to write the story for her. Insisting that Foe not change anything in her account, she provides him with extensive details concerning her stay on the island, however, without mentioning her being a prostitute. The reason for the omission is probably her hope to dissimulate her shameful past, legitimizing the reinvention with a narrative by an acclaimed author. She treats writing as a chance for establishing a new

92 Masloń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 67.

93 Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, 2nd ed. (1986; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7.

identity, a new truth, or at least as a means of rationalizing her fantasy of herself. Accordingly, through Barton, Coetzee seems to argue that writing can be used to manipulate reality, whether by reinventing or omitting facts.

However, if Foe is the actual *alter ego* for Daniel Defoe, and *Foe* is a speculation over the origins of *Robinson Crusoe*, then Barton's request was not recognized. In Defoe's novel, there is no female character on the island; Crusoe is presented as a paragon of capitalistic values, and Friday has never been muted by him. Barton's story is adjusted to the values of her times; *Robinson Crusoe* praises the colonial mindset, and there are no women in it as female presence on an island inhabited by only two men would be considered improper. Coetzee refers to the sexist bias in the following extract from a conversation between Foe and Barton: "'Better had there been only Cruso and Friday,' you will murmur to yourself: 'Better without woman.'"⁹⁴ Barton's tale is rationalized by the contemporary reason, regardless that the rationalization involves a distortion of the truth. Accordingly, Coetzee presents writing as a type of manipulation confirming and reflecting the requirements of the prevailing thought paradigms. By speculating over Defoe's confabulations, he highlights that the manipulations are traceable even in the greatest works of literature, and that they are frequently underwritten by what Costello refers to as "willed ignorance,"⁹⁵ that is, by a purposeful omission of facts exceeding the standards.

Coetzee's critique of reason is visible at the starkest in Barton and Cruso's failure to recognize the alterity of Friday's rituals. Occasionally, Friday swims to an off-shore spot and throws petals on the surface of the water. Cruso and Barton speculate that he does it to commemorate the dead from the shipwreck on which he was brought to the island. They rationalize the situation by telling each other stories explaining Friday's behavior, but none of the explanations is convincing enough to incorporate Friday into the Western thought

⁹⁴ Coetzee, *Foe*, 71-72.

⁹⁵ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 25.

system and comprehend him. Friday is eventually ignored. Accordingly, ignorance is presented by Coetzee as the way in which reason defends itself against phenomena which exceed its scope. There are other examples of ignorance of alterity in the novel. Cruso's "stupid architecture" on the island does not comply with the capitalistic mindset, hence it is ignored by Foe. Similarly, Barton's past as a prostitute does not fit her vision of herself, therefore, she consistently dissimulates it, even at the price of disowning her abject daughter. Barton refuses to sympathize with the girl also when she dies at her door. Barton's callousness can be perceived as an illustration of the rationalist disregard for the other, their feelings, and their alterity.

Susan's hyper-rationality is questioned during her dance. In an attempt to understand Friday, Susan imitates his dance, but every time she does it, she becomes unconscious. Instead of extending her knowledge, she realizes that there is a limit to what she might know, and the limit is represented by Friday. Moreover, despite her consecutive failures, Barton appears to enjoy the dance. She cannot explain why but she feels compelled to repeat her spinning. Her inability to explain her own proclivities is another evidence of reason's cognitive limitedness.

Coetzee's critique of reason extends onto Defoe's other works. Coetzee's aim in *Foe* is, on the one hand, to seek the original inspiration of *Robinson Crusoe*, and on the other, to speculate on the omissions and distortions that Defoe would have had to introduce to the original story to adjust it to the conceptual framework of his times. A careful reader will spot that, in *Foe*, Coetzee has assembled elements of Barton's story from Defoe's various works, among them *Roxana* and "A True Revelation of the Apparition of One Mrs Veal." Accordingly, the historical Defoe writes *Roxana* (1724), a story of a fallen prostitute, whose real name is Susan, and who gets killed by her servant, Amy, orphaning a child named Susan. In *Foe*, there is also a character called Amy, and Susan Barton has a

daughter named Susan who dies due to her neglect. Another similarity is that Susan Barton is a French Huguenot, similarly to Defoe's Roxana. Admittedly, while Coetzee presents Susan Barton as a prototype of Roxana, he also implies that *Robinson Crusoe* is actually based on her account, although significantly censored by Defoe. In this way, Coetzee demonstrates that despite Defoe's adjustments to make his story fit the paradigm of his time, the original story eventually resurfaces. It can be reassembled from various pieces of writing by the same author. *Foe* is an attempt at such a reassembling, and although it cannot be deemed as a reconstruction of true events, Coetzee does indicate that literature not only manipulates reality but that it also reflects it, repeating and perpetuating the operative modes of thinking.⁹⁶

Towards the end of *Foe*, the narration is transferred from Barton, who lies dead on a bed next to dead Foe, onto the reader. The focus is on Friday's mouth; the mouth is open and there are the sounds of Cruso's island coming out from it. The reader recognizes Friday as the main character. It can be argued that the purpose of the scene is to symbolize the birth of aboriginal literature. Yet such an interpretation is another misconception of the Western mind about itself and the other. By perceiving Friday as a symbolic source of native literature, readers of *Foe* adjust him to Western concepts of origin, writing and language. They force their rationalizations onto him, thus distorting his image of himself; moreover, they do it regardless of his consent. Accordingly, Coetzee argues that it is impossible to avoid the limitations of reason because they are ingrained in cognition itself. Whenever one thinks something, the object of his/her thought is always distorted by the cognitive apparatus, the thinker's values as well as the context of the thought. The content of one's thought is determined by the effective modes of thinking.⁹⁷

In his former novels, especially in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Dusklands*, Coetzee

96 Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee*, 63.

97 Cf. Masłóń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 87-88.

points out that those who exceed reason's reach suffer pain and humiliation. Michael K faces ostracism and constant displacement; he feels oppressed when he is defined according to the rational frame of reference. K is hence determined as a vagabond, a cripple, a hedonist, and the aim of such denotations is to accommodate him to the framework of Western cognitive categories. In *Foe*, the cause of Friday's handicap is similar; his cut-out tongue makes him fit the Western category of a mute. Admittedly, Coetzee depicts rationalization as an oppressive experience; however, it could also be argued that pain evinces a failure of reason. This double function of pain, as a proof and dissimulator of reason's weakness, is present in Coetzee's 1990 novel *Age of Iron*.

4.7. *Age of Iron*

Similarly to his former novels, in *Age of Iron* Coetzee exposes the limitations of reason by making the protagonist, Elizabeth Curren, an aging literature professor, suffer a severe bodily affliction. She has a cancer and, similarly to Eugene Dawn, she accepts her fate, resolving in a Heideggerian way "to embrace death as [her] own."⁹⁸ However, her hyper-rationalism is compromised when her pain becomes too intense to control her body. Realizing that reason will not help her bear the suffering, Mrs. Curren is forced to palliatives to assuage the pain. However, the drug makes her frequently fall asleep, which connotes *Waiting for the Barbarians*, in which the failure of reason is also demonstrated through the main character's loss of consciousness. Moreover, Curren loses control over her everyday life. As the pain increases, she struggles to follow her agenda, her day must be adjusted to relapses and moments of relief when the medicine takes effect. Confronted with the body, reason proves ineffective and, despite its totalizing tendencies, it turns out

98 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Age of Iron* (1990; New York: Penguin, 1998), 6.

substantially inefficient.⁹⁹

Apart from bodily pain, Curren also experiences an increasing existential discomfort. Approaching death, she reflects on her life and finds it boring and worthless; she feels she has wasted her time chasing after insignificant and obsolete things, and that there is scarce time left to recuperate. Therefore, when she meets Vercueil, a black drunkard, she decides to take care of him, hoping that such a sympathetic gesture will add value to her existence, at least in her own eyes. However, concerned solely with assuaging her life crisis, she exoticizes the vagabond to fit her image of herself as sympathetic and sensitive person. She projects Vercueil as an angel sent to her so she is not alone in her last days. She resorts to the projection to make herself feel necessary and, perhaps, loved. Clearly, having been abandoned by her emigrant daughter, she might be in need of a deep familial affection. It is also possible that she wants to reinvent her past; Curren takes care of Vercueil out of remorse for not doing anything to counteract the hardships and injustices suffered by the black people of South Africa.¹⁰⁰

Mrs. Curren records her struggles in a letter to her daughter. As it is not certain whether the daughter will ever read the letter, it could be claimed that Curren's writing has the same function as Foe's narrative for Susan Barton. Through writing, Curren endeavors to present her life in a positive light, either by reinventing her past or by leaving the shameful moments unmentioned. In this respect, Curren cares more for herself than for Vercueil and the oppressed minorities she claims to support. She is self-centered and, especially with regard to the vagabond, hypocritical. It could accordingly be argued that Curren is presented in a negative manner to caricature the whites who help the underprivileged out of the vane desire for recognition, not out of sense of justice.

99 See Kim L. Worthington, "Age of Iron (1990)," in Mehigan, *A Companion to the Works of J. M. Coetzee*, 113-115.

100 Derek Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 104.

Curren's narcissism emerges when she forgets herself in particularly stressful situations. One of such moments is when she joins a black skirmish and curses a black girl escaping a spreading fire. She thinks of the girl with disgust as “an enormously fat teenager.”¹⁰¹ It could be claimed that, once faced with danger, Curren reveals her true attitude to blacks. At such moments it also becomes clear what she really thinks of their riots. When Thabane, one of the insurgents, claims that the fight for freedom requires sacrifice and that black people are united by the idea of brotherhood, Curren refers to his attitude as fascist. She discredits their fight claiming that it is based on false assumptions, including the promise of freedom and prosperity. Accordingly, despite her support, she does not seem to sympathize with the oppressed; she cannot understand their struggle because she does not share their perspective, which is why she eventually encourages them to quit the fight. Due to her deficient sympathy and limited insight into the blacks' torment, her self-projection as a social campaigner becomes gradually compromised.¹⁰²

Curren realizes that her opposition against social injustice lacks confirmation. When faced with a chance to prove it, she withdraws into the safety of her whites-only neighborhood. Realizing her cowardice, she feels ashamed; nevertheless, she soon turns to aestheticizing her shame, pleading guilty for all the crimes of apartheid. However, having acquired no admiration for the plea, she declares a readiness to burn herself in protest against the injustices of apartheid. Such a declaration makes her feel brave; her sense of self-importance is additionally elated by the fact that self-burning is an effective way of dying, attracting people's attention. She seems pompous and melodramatic in her declarations, but when Vercueil gives her a can of petrol and a lighter, urging her to use them against herself, she gets scared and withdraws, “[b]urning with rage.”¹⁰³ Her declarations turn out to be mere wishful thinking, pretentious abstractions, produced out of

101 Coetzee, *Age of Iron*, 96.

102 Masłóń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 100.

103 Coetzee, *Age of Iron*, 126.

vanity, rather than sympathy or opposition to the injustices of apartheid.¹⁰⁴

There are numerous lapses in Curren's reasoning, also in her childhood memories. In the flashbacks, while she admits blacks in her idealized vision of country life, she places them on social margins, picturing them as docile servants or as half-human savages. Among them, there is John, a rebellious son of her black servant, and Bheki, whom she considers violent and uncivilized for the world of whites. All the talk about the merits of childhood concerns her own youth, and not that of the black children, nor that of any other repressed group. It could thus be argued that she might be prejudiced against black people; it looks as if she did not think them worthy of happy lives. Furthermore, they are absent from her idealizations of childhood because Curren cannot conceive of blacks as capable of peaceful self-governance. And even if they did, a change of social paradigm would mean social unrest, retribution of wrongs, and possibly a lower status for numerous whites. In private, then, Curren denies black independence for fear of losing comfortable lifestyle and other social privileges. She attaches more value to the luxuries of her terminating life than to the black fighting for freedom and a prospective improvement in their fate. Consequently, although she voices support for the black liberation movement, she appears in favor of the apartheid vision of South Africa in which blacks die in riots while whites enjoy their country lives, helping rioters only declaratively or when it benefits their self-image of just and civilized people.¹⁰⁵

The question is why, in light of her latent prejudice against blacks, Curren takes care of Vercueil, a black vagabond and drunkard, frequently considered a shame to the black community. On the one hand, Curren is drawn to Vercueil because he symbolizes blacks' fall. By supporting Vercueil, she in a sense supports the vision of black people as lazy vagabonds. On the other hand, Vercueil is a safe choice; unlike the rebels, passive

104 Cf. Samantha Vice, "Truth and Love Together at Last," in Leist and Singer, *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics*, 312.

105 Masloń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 100-103.

Vercueil will not endanger her vision of white superiority over blacks. In fact, he confirms it, leading a passive life, engrossed in perverse pleasures, alcohol, and dirt. It could also be claimed that Curren and Vercueil are similar to each other; they both prefer the stability of the *status quo*. Accordingly, she helps Vercueil because he embodies almost all white stereotypes about blacks. John and Bheki know it, thus they reproach him for his behavior, especially for his compulsive drinking. They argue that he brings shame to black people. Witnessing their hostility, Curren scolds John and Bheki for insensitivity. She mocks the youths by comparing them to sober puritans. Her reaction against John and Bheki confirms that she supports the image of blacks epitomized by Vercueil.¹⁰⁶

Curren idealizes the brutal reality she witnesses; when she is directly faced with the cruelties, she either becomes melodramatic, or she withdraws, engaging in another fantasy, and further excusing her ignorance. It can be argued that she lives in abstraction, in an artificially constructed world reserved solely for whites, founded on egoistic reasoning. Of note, she knows of her life in a fantasy, which she confirms by comparing herself to a doll: “once upon a time I was alive [...] and then was stolen from life. From a cradle a theft took place: a child was taken and a doll left in its place to be nursed and reared, and that doll is what I call I.”¹⁰⁷ Curren continues demystifying her abstractions with a logic of heroism, biased respect for life, praise for the beauty of white culture, aestheticization of country life, and Western ideals. Engrossed in her confabulations, however, she does occasionally realize how limited her worldview is; at such moments, she reproaches herself for pursuing naive fantasizes, instead of engaging in meaningful relations with other people. Although Curren does try to recuperate, she fails for being incapacitated by her racist, white-centered, and absolutist thought paradigm.¹⁰⁸

106 Ibid., 111-112.

107 Coetzee, *Age of Iron*, 106.

108 Sue Kossew, “‘Women’s Words’: A Reading of J. M. Coetzee’s Women Narrators,” in Kossew, *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee*, 175; Masloń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 101-104.

It seems that Coetzee's aim in the novel is to show that certain worldviews are wrong at their inception, and in order to defy them, one needs to exceed his/her values and thought paradigms. Despite her noble intentions, Curren cannot do it because of the limitations imposed on her by the apartheid logic and its accompanying racist ethics. Her instilled prejudice is thus the ultimate cause of her failure at valorizing her boring life, even though she initially appears genuinely motivated to exceed her limitations and fight against social injustices in her country. As Coetzee implies, helping the fighting blacks during the riots poses a chance to add value to her life, yet Curren considers it a threat, thus the chance is wasted.

Age of Iron is an epistolary novel, that is, it takes the form of a letter written by Mrs. Curren to her daughter who, disgusted with apartheid, has emigrated from South Africa. According to Woessner, such a choice of literary genre could be perceived as Coetzee's way of demonstrating reason's limitations. Woessner claims that "Curren tries hard to remain detached, to offer a merely clear portrait of the world her daughter has left behind [but] she cannot ignore the fact that her letter is in its own way an emotional appeal."¹⁰⁹ She asks her daughter to read the letter with "a cold eye,"¹¹⁰ which implies rationality and almost scientific objectiveness, but letters are neither written nor read in such a manner. On the contrary, the epistolary form is recognized as allowing for subjective points of view, emotions rather than reason, thus making room for inconsistency and irrationality. If an avowed rationalist turns to letters as a form of expression, then it can be interpreted as a sign of the rationalistic worldview's limitedness. By showing Mrs. Curren, a rationalist of the Heideggerian type, writing a letter to her daughter, Coetzee depicts her as unsatisfied with life and disillusioned with rationalism. Derek Attridge refers to her disillusionment as "an experience in which unlearning is as important as learning."¹¹¹ Paradoxically, a

¹⁰⁹ Woessner, "Coetzee's Critique of Reason," 236.

¹¹⁰ Coetzee, *Age of Iron*, 104.

¹¹¹ Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, 92.

collapse of her rationalism is what makes Curren strive for a sense of life and communicate with her absent daughter. As Attridge further argues, “Mrs Curren is achieving a difficult escape [from] the discourse of knowledge as content and inheritable property [while learning] contextualized responsiveness, activity, and self-questioning.”¹¹²

4.8. *The Master of Petersburg*

While *Age of Iron* treats about a flawed use reason, in *The Master of Petersburg* Coetzee speculates on the inspirations preceding one of the greatest works of Western literature, *Demons* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. In his novel, Coetzee presents a character named Fyodor Dostoevsky, an *alter ego* of the historical Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821-1881), who leaves his home in Dresden and travels to St. Petersburg in order to investigate the circumstances of his stepson's death. Although it is not stated clearly, the deceased, Pavel, is the son of his former wife, abandoned by Dostoevsky for a younger woman. The reason for Dostoevsky's travel is his feeling of remorse for contributing to Pavel's death by leaving him and his mother without securing their livelihood. However, as *The Master of Petersburg* progresses, it becomes clear that Dostoevsky's real purpose in St. Petersburg is to write a new novel, and Pavel's death seems to him as a potential source of literary material. Gradually, Dostoevsky emerges as a narcissistic character, dissimulating his abuse of Pavel as a symptom of his revived fatherly love.¹¹³

Another reason why the fictional Dostoevsky travels to St. Petersburg may be to prevent being compared to his despotic father who mistreated him as a child and whom he still despises for his promiscuity and neglect of family. It is noteworthy that Coetzee bases the fictional Dostoevsky's past on the rumored animosity between the historical Fyodor

¹¹² Cf. Vice, “Truth and Love Together at Last,” 307.

¹¹³ Anton Leist and Peter Singer, “Introduction: Coetzee and Philosophy,” in Leist and Singer, *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics*, 10.

Dostoyevsky, and his father, Mikhail Dostoyevsky, a Moscow doctor and an alleged hedonist abusing alcohol and displaying pedophile proclivities. Although Mikhail cared for his son's future, sending him to good schools, thus assuring him with a respectable social position, young Fyodor seemed little interested in the comforts offered by his family. He was a fragile man, frequently described as a romantic dreamer with a strong sense of justice, eager to help the poor and the underprivileged. During his engineering studies, he earned a reputation of a recluse, siding more with teachers than with his classmates. He devoted his free time to religious practices and reading literature. Although he owed much to his father, they became alienated, mainly because young Fyodor condemned his father's immoralities. Mikhail Dostoyevsky died of an apoplectic stroke when Fyodor was still at school. However, according to his brothers and neighbors, Mikhail was killed by his servants who revolted against his strict rule. Although the murder is only rumored, Coetzee includes it in the biography of the fictional Dostoevsky, additionally implying that his protagonist might have conspired with the servants, thus contributing to his father demise. The reason for Dostoevsky's involvement in the plot might have been his desire to punish his father for his immoral behavior as well as to avenge his parental abuses and neglects.¹¹⁴

Abandoning his wife and Pavel for a younger woman, thus indirectly contributing to their misery, the fictional Dostoevsky emulates the transgressions of his father. He betrays the ideals of his youth and repeats the abuses which he despised in his father. Therefore, it can be argued that Dostoevsky's real purpose in Russia is to dissimulate the similarity between himself and his libertine father. He bemoans his stepson's fate not for the love of Pavel but rather for the love of himself; he pities himself as well as the betrayed ideals of his youth, hoping that the pretense will allow him to dissimulate their loss, possibly even

¹¹⁴ Joseph Frank, *Fyodor Dostoyevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 5-37; cf. Kenneth Lantz, *The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia* (London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 61, 109.

before himself.

Accordingly, in *The Master of Petersburg*, Fyodor Dostoevsky's mourning seems forced and insincere. The grief he shows at Pavel's funeral is exaggerated and theatrically artificial; he falls to his knees, cries, and insists to have loved his stepson; he also laments over the negligence of his parental duties regarding Pavel. It could be argued that by giving an emphatically melodramatic display of his pain and suffering, Dostoevsky seeks to present himself as "an object of pity,"¹¹⁵ echoing Elizabeth Curren's egocentric disposition to self-pity. Accordingly, there is a moment when Dostoevsky's artificiality becomes exposed; after mourning over Pavel's grave, he stands up and says to himself: "[w]hat a Jewish performance,"¹¹⁶ comparing his behavior to the stereotype of Jewish falsity. The pretense of his grief is further confirmed by the fact that, after the funeral, he never visits Pavel's grave again.¹¹⁷

Dostoevsky soon grows tired of the appearance and, following his father's steps, he indulges in easing his sexual fantasies. He has an affair with Pavel's landlady, Anna Sergeyevna Kolenkina. There is also a reference to his pedophile proclivities when Anna realizes that he seduces her to gain access to her minor daughter and Pavel's lover, Matryona. She voices her fears in the following passage:

But you use me as a route to my child [...] and I cannot bear it! [...] You are in the grip of something quite beyond me. You seem to be here but you are not really here. I was ready to help you [because] of Pavel, because of what you said. I was ready to try. But now it is costing me too much. It is wearing me down. I would never have gone so far if I weren't afraid you would use Matryosha in the same way.¹¹⁸

Weary and disgusted, Anna leaves Dostoevsky, yet after a while she comes back to spend a night with him. She sacrifices herself hoping that in this way she will divert his attention

¹¹⁵ John Maxwell Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg* (1994; Penguin Books: New York, 1995), 67.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Masłoń, *Coetzee: Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej*, 183-204.

¹¹⁸ Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg*, 231-232.

away from her daughter. Indeed, Dostoevsky's purpose in St. Petersburg is not mourning his late stepson; rather, he uses a pretense of grief to seduce young women and, similarly to his father, satisfy his sexual promiscuity.¹¹⁹

Moreover, Dostoevsky is interested in Pavel because he treats him as a way to his other fascination, Nechaev, a young Russian revolutionary, a symbol of unruly spirit and youth. Nechaev is viewed by Dostoevsky as an eternal rebel: "[n]ot an anarchist, not a nihilist [...]. He does not act in the name of ideas. He acts when he feels action stirring in his body. He is a sensualist. He is an extremist of the senses. [...] That is why he can say *everything is permitted*."¹²⁰ Nechaev represents the endless struggle between fathers and sons, which Dostoevsky perceives as a "war: the old against the young, the young against the old."¹²¹ When they meet, Nechaev confirms that he has "always had a suspicion about fathers, that their true sin, the one they never confess, is greed. They want everything for themselves. They won't hand over the moneybags, even when it's time."¹²² However, as the following quote proves, Nechaev does not share Dostoevsky's notion of the struggle between generations: of himself as a rebel against the old. As the following quote proves, a true revolt for Nechaev would be an end to the distinction between the old and the young:

You think that because you and your father hated each other, the history of the world has to consist of nothing but fathers and sons at war with each other. You do not understand the meaning of revolution. Revolution is the end of everything old, including fathers and sons. It is the end of succession and dynasties. And it keeps renewing itself, if it is true revolution.¹²³

For Nechaev, a true revolution would be an end to the animosity between the old and the young. Dostoevsky does not accept Nechaev's claim; for him, it is impossible to end the son-father rivalry because "fathers and sons [are] foes; foes to the death."¹²⁴ He thinks that

119 Masloń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 148.

120 Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg*, 113-114 (emphasis original).

121 Ibid., 247.

122 Ibid., 158.

123 Ibid., 189.

124 Ibid., 239.

Nechaev's reconciliatory claims are an element of the sons' tactics for defeating the fathers by keeping the pretense of amicability. He interprets Nechaev's arguments as a provocation.¹²⁵

It could be argued that Nechaev's view of the revolution is dialectical in the sense discussed in Chapter III; echoing Richard Nisbett's analysis of Asian dialecticism, Nechaev seems to opt for a harmony of opposites, in this case, a harmony of the old with the young. Dostoevsky does not accept Nechaev's ideas because the rivalry between sons and fathers is the only excuse he can provide for his abandonment of Pavel. In his opinion, the rivalry also justifies his sexual interest in Anna Sergeyevna and Matryona; since they are related to Pavel, he perceives his seduction of them as an element of the rivalry.

Another reason why Dostoevsky resents Nechaev is because he makes it clear that Dostoevsky's youth is irretrievable. As the following quote demonstrates, youth is what attracts Dostoevsky to the women he lusts for: "Matryona slips away, comes back with a wet rag. [...] Little sister. Was she like this with Pavel too? Something gnaws at his heart: envy."¹²⁶ Youth is also what fascinates him about Pavel. To be more precise, the source of Dostoevsky's envy is his stepson's immortalized youth. Precisely, because of dying young, Pavel will always remain young in people's memory. The fantasy of eternal youth is, however, unachievable for old Dostoevsky. As Nechaev claims, Dostoevsky may dissimulate his age by marrying women half his age, or by seducing girls, but because of his advancing years, he will always be remembered as an old man. Nechaev's remark is confirmed by Anna Sergeyevna who implies that Dostoevsky does not mourn his son but himself, the loss of his own youth, and the fact that he cannot retrieve it. In this sense, the reason why Dostoevsky rejects Nechaev's dialectical view over the generation struggle is because it puts him in the position of the fathers: old and destined to be replaced by the

¹²⁵ Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Coetzee*, 75.

¹²⁶ Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg*, 156.

young.

Dostoevsky punishes Nechaev for spoiling his idealized image of himself by presenting the revolutionary as an incarnation of the ultimate evil, Stavrogin, in his upcoming novel, *Demons*, the opening lines of which fill in the closing paragraphs of *The Master of Petersburg*. Accordingly, in Coetzee's novel, *Demons* is presented as Dostoevsky's manipulation of Pavel's unfinished narrative; by presenting Nechaev as the villain Stavrogin, Dostoevsky makes the appearance that his stepson perceived Nechaev not as a hero fighting for justice, but as a rascal who callously abuses the weak and less privileged. Moreover, by writing a novel that is a continuation of Pavel's work, Dostoevsky symbolically becomes Pavel, thereby, symbolically achieving his goal of regaining youth. Coetzee refers to Dostoevsky's transformation in the following passage:

In his writing he is in the same room, sitting at the table much as he is sitting now. But the room is Pavel's and Pavel's alone. And he is not himself any longer, not a man in the forty-ninth year of his life. Instead he is young again, with all the arrogant strength of youth.¹²⁷

In fiction, Dostoevsky can project himself as he wishes, and he has control over how he will be remembered. Therefore, when he says: "I write perversions of the truth,"¹²⁸ Dostoevsky seems the most genuine in the entire novel. To an extent, he is an amalgam of Foe, the manipulator novelist from Coetzee's *Foe*, and of Elizabeth Curren, an aging professor of literature with a tendency to melodrama and theatricality.¹²⁹

Dostoevsky's actual purpose in coming to St. Petersburg is thus to find a way to reinvent himself, not to reveal the circumstances of Pavel's death. Occasionally, he senses the paradox of how he rationalizes his fantasies:

If he expects his son to speak in the voice of the unexpected, he will never hear

¹²⁷ Ibid., 242.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 236.

¹²⁹ Cf. Masłóń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 153-156.

him. As long as he expects what he does not expect, what he does not expect will come. Therefore – paradox within paradox, darkness swaddled in darkness – he must answer to what he does not expect.¹³⁰

On the one hand, he engages in an analytical search for his stepson's death, his enquiry is logical and well-reasoned. On the other hand, however, he realizes that what he strives for exceeds the rational mind; as he claims, his objectives cannot be “expected.” He admits that the irrational, “the heart,” takes advantage over the rational disquisition: “[i]t is as though a fog has settled over his brain. If he were a character in a book, what would he say, at a moment like this when either the heart speaks or the page remains blank?”¹³¹ Confirming the limitedness of the analytical mind, he acknowledges that “as long as he tries by cunning to distinguish things that are things from things that are signs he will not be saved.”¹³² However, Dostoevsky does not use rationality to find out about Pavel's death; on the contrary, he uses the pretense of rationality to dissimulate the real purpose of his investigation. For Dostoevsky, reason is a tool of deceit; he instrumentalizes it for his own immoral purposes.¹³³

Fyodor Dostoevsky's motivations are thus narcissistic. Despite the appearances, he occasionally divulges what he really thinks of Pavel. Before the investigating officer Ivanov, he speaks of Pavel as a loser, sexual failure and a weakling, and he treats him as his adversary; in Dostoevsky's descriptions, Pavel is lazy, irresponsible and incapable of rebelling against any authority, both state and parental. In this context, it could be argued that Dostoevsky does not wish to take care of Pavel's memory but to destroy it, thereby dissimulating his responsibility for his death.

Dostoevsky comes to resemble his father; he turns out callous and concentrated solely on himself. In a sense, he is also similar to Nechaev, a revolutionary ready to sacrifice

130 Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg*, 80.

131 Ibid., 97.

132 Ibid., 83.

133 Cf. Heister, “The Sympathetic Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee,” 176.

people for the cause he finds important, yet unlike Nechaev, who speaks openly about his abuses, Dostoevsky mystifies his aberrations. As Coetzee implies, a result of such mystifications is one of the greatest literary works, *Demons*, where the historical Dostoyevsky skillfully depicts timeless issues, earning for himself international acclaim and, symbolically, an eternal life in the memory of his readers. It could be argued that he achieves his most perverse fantasy, i.e., immortality, at least symbolically. Dostoevsky realizes the failed endeavors of at least Coetzee's two characters, Jacobus Coetzee and Susan Barton, who wish to validate their corrupt reasoning by means of literature, but lack Dostoevsky's perversity in dissimulating his abuses of rational disquisition.

In *The Master of Petersburg*, Coetzee demonstrates how reason can be manipulated into explaining perverse deviations, the abuse of the weak, and even one's own suffering by providing it with a skillfully crafted story. On the one hand, he asserts to the potential of narration; on the other, he implies there can be perverse logic behind the most sublimated and acknowledged works of culture. Another implication of Coetzee's endeavor is that, apart from fine literature, perverse logic could also form the foundations of value systems, morality, and modes of cognition. The sense of *Foe* and *The Master of Petersburg* is that the current thought paradigms, whether they concern art, ethics, or knowledge, could be based on mere misconceptions, fantasies, or mistakes believed to be true. In *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee tests the thought paradigms concerning animality and the man-animal relation.

4.9. *Elizabeth Costello*

Elizabeth Costello is Coetzee's 2003 novel composed of edited texts that Coetzee had already published elsewhere. The texts are arranged in eight "Lessons" and a "Postscript." The third and fourth "Lessons" are the slightly modified version of *The Lives of Animals*.

In the novel, the titular protagonist travels around the world to give lectures on topics regarding animal rights, literature, sexuality, evil, and death. Elizabeth Costello is renowned for writing *The House on Eccles Street*, a novel that retells James Joyce's *Ulysses* from the viewpoint of the protagonist's wife, Molly Bloom. Despite the acclaim, aging Costello seems disillusioned about her life. She reproaches herself for satisfying her narcissistic pleasure of writing by including her family in her novels and manipulating their image without their authorization. She realizes that she abused the family's trust, and by exposing their affairs to public view, she antagonized them against her. Feeling guilty for the harm she has done, she attempts to recuperate, but she is no longer welcome among them.

It is Norma who directly accuses Costello of narcissistic motivations. She claims that Costello presents herself as a defender of animal rights not because she is genuinely concerned with animal fate, but she rather strives to project herself as exceptional. In Norma's view, Costello uses her abstinence from meat in order to "self-define [herself] as elite, as elected."¹³⁴ Norma's accusation seems to be identical with the one made against Dostoevsky: they both present themselves as loving and caring but it is only a pretense to raise their self-esteem. They both manipulate facts, and then they present them as objectively valid through their work. Dostoevsky demonizes Nechaev as Stavrogin; Costello aestheticizes animals as full of being, sensitive, and worthy of human respect. It could be argued that, similarly to Dostoevsky, Costello perverts the truth for the acclaim she gains from writing.

Costello praises the poetry of Ted Hughes (1930-1998), an English twentieth-century poet, especially the so-called Jaguar poems, because she thinks he represents animals in their own right, without distorting them with "the Western bias toward abstract thought."¹³⁵

¹³⁴ John Maxwell Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (2003; London: Vintage, 2004), 87.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

In the following passage she explains how Hughes exceeds the logic of *l'animot*:

When Hughes the poet stands before the jaguar cage, he looks at an individual jaguar and is possessed by that individual jaguar life. It has to be that way. Jaguars in general, the subspecies jaguar, the idea of a jaguar, will fail to move him because we cannot experience abstractions. Nevertheless, the poem that Hughes writes is about *the* jaguar, about jaguarness embodied in this jaguar. [...] So despite the vividness and earthiness of the poetry, there remains something Platonic about it.¹³⁶

Costello praises Hughes for the purity of his vision; she claims that he managed to exceed the logic of *l'animot* and present the described jaguar as it is in itself, without ideological interference. However, as Jacques Derrida claimed, it is impossible to speak of animals beyond the logic of *l'animot* because people, solely restricted to human cognitive abilities, cannot perceive the world as animals do, nor can they alternate between the human and animal modes of thinking. Man is always limited by the resources of his own reason, in particular, he is limited to ideas. Accordingly, when Hughes writes about a specific jaguar, he aestheticizes it with his idea of jaguarness, whether he wants it or not. He can never see the real animal as its mental representation is always mediated with its *a priori* idea. Costello recognizes this typically Kantian approach to perception, although she calls it Platonic: “despite the vividness and earthiness of [Hughes's] poetry, there remains something Platonic about it.”¹³⁷ That she calls it Platonic is negligible because Kant's theory of appearances and things-in-themselves, elucidated in the first *Critique*, is frequently thought to have been inspired by Platon's cave allegory.¹³⁸

Consequently, Costello falls into contradiction; on the one hand, she grants animals an independent voice, on the other, however, she praises the same imagery which approaches animals *en masse* as a homogeneous group defined along the logic of *l'animot*:

¹³⁶ Ibid., 98 (emphasis original).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ See Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 192.

In the ecological vision, the salmon and the river-weeds and the water-insects interact in a great, complex dance with the earth and the weather. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. In the dance, each organism has a role: it is these multiple roles, rather than the particular beings who play them, that participate in the dance. As for actual role-players, as long as they are self-renewing, as long as they keep coming forward, we need pay them no heed. [...] I called this Platonic and I do so again. Our eye is on the creature itself, but our mind is on the system of interactions of which it is the earthly, material embodiment.¹³⁹

Eventually, Costello spots a failure in her reasoning and, unlike Dostoevsky, she seems traumatized by it. She realizes that her argumentation is not consistent with her everyday life; she admits to wearing leather, and stepping over vermin, yet she concedes that she occasionally pretends not to see nearby factory farms and abattoirs. She does it in order not to antagonize others with her radical views and also for fear of being ridiculed. It can be claimed that Costello's inconsistency is mainly due to social pressure; ignorance is thus presented as a way of avoiding potentially uncomfortable consequences of opposing the logic. Another implication of Costello's self-criticism is that people frequently dissimulate the ignorance by rationalizing it as unavoidable or negligible.¹⁴⁰

Wary of self-ordained manipulations, Costello reflects on the limits of her own thinking. She investigates the extent to which her convictions might result from her self-excusing fabrications, and then she tests them. An example of such self-discipline is provided in "At the Gate," the last of the eight Lessons, in which Costello is set in circumstances resembling Kafka's "Before the Law." At the beginning, she finds herself facing a guarded gate, she wants to walk through it, but she is denied because she cannot make a proper statement of belief. The guard who watches the gate advises her to reconsider and try again later. He also says that she may come any time that suits her because he is never off duty. Informed of such an unusual availability, Costello realizes that the place is fictional, and that she might be a character in a story, possibly of her own

139 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 98-99.

140 Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee*, 83.

making. Coetzee observes that Costello “finds herself, where the guardian of the gate never sleeps and the people in the cafés seem to have nowhere to go, no obligation other than to fill the air with their chatter, is no more real than she: no more real but perhaps no less.”¹⁴¹ Costello soon realizes that the story is an allegory of her own life and that the gate symbolizes a passage to heaven. Accordingly, it can be claimed that by equipping Costello with such meta-knowledge, Coetzee makes his readers ponder on their own situatedness, their beliefs, and the genuineness of their rationalizations.¹⁴²

Having initially refused to deliver a statement of belief, Costello soon voices her beliefs; she claims that she believes in the frogs from the Dulgannon River in southern Australia. As she argues, the choice is based on her assumption that the frogs “do not bother to believe in [her],”¹⁴³ therefore, they remain unaffected by being misrepresented. Accordingly, by depicting Costello’s final struggle, Coetzee demonstrates that it is impossible to shed one’s convictions entirely and be unbiased. To think otherwise is to suffer a contradiction because a lack of convictions is already a conviction.

When Costello spots a dog lying at the gate, she interprets it as a symbol of God, and she does so not solely because of the DOG-GOD pun, but because she adjusts her thinking to the allegorical context of her situation. Knowing that she is part of an allegorical story, she cannot perceive the dog in a non-allegorical way, nor can she test such a perception; she can only be aware of the reasons behind the perception. Coetzee refers to the awareness in the penultimate sentence of the ensuing excerpt:

She has a vision of the gate [...]. At the foot of the gate, blocking the way, lies stretched out a dog, an old dog, his lion-coloured hide scarred from innumerable manglings. His eyes are closed, he is resting, snoozing. Beyond him is nothing but a desert of sand and stone, to infinity. It is her first vision in a long while, and she does not trust it, does not trust in particular the anagram GOD-DOG. *Too*

¹⁴¹ Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 195.

¹⁴² Michael Funk Deckard and Ralph Palm, “Irony and Belief in *Elizabeth Costello*,” in Leist and Singer, *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics*, 346-347, 350.

¹⁴³ Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 218.

literary, she thinks again. A curse on literature!¹⁴⁴

It is worth mentioning that the dog does not evoke an image of God; on the contrary, it is old, unattractive, and beaten. This is why Costello does not trust the allegory. Yet being in an allegorical story, she feels forced to comply with the allegorical paradigm and to recognize the dog as standing for God, even though it is unlikely due to the dog's appearance. It is because of this enforcement that Costello curses literature in the above quote.

One of the overarching paradigms is the conviction of reason's supremacy over non-rational modes of cognition. In the third Lesson, "The Philosophers and Animals," Coetzee implies through Norma that vegetarianism is also a conviction, that is, a moral attitude only subjectively recognized as right. Cora Diamond claims that the discretionary character of vegetarianism is its advantage. The claim refers to Kant's Formula of Autonomy, according to which freedom and a good will are the basis of morality; without them, one chooses not what one thinks is right but what one is impelled to choose, which in Kantian ethics forecloses morality by countering the categorical imperative. Accordingly, when one refrains from meat not because of being forced or obligated to do so, but because one thinks it is a right thing to do, then vegetarianism evinces one's good will, it is a symptom of one's morality and, as Kant would argue, one's humanity. Should vegetarianism be based solely on empirical data, or should it be required only by law, it would fit the Kantian notion of hypothetical imperative, thus losing its ethical character.

The Kantian idea of humanity underlies Costello's juxtaposition of the Holocaust with the indifference to the suffering of slaughtered animals. According to Costello, the shared characteristic of the contemporary slaughterhouse witnesses and of those who passively witnessed the Holocaust is their indifference to suffering. Costello provides the following

144 Ibid., 224-225 (emphasis original).

argumentation:

The people who lived in the countryside around Treblinka – Poles, for the most part – said that they did not know what was going on in the camp; said that, while in a general way they might have guessed what was going on, they did not know for sure; said that, while in a sense they might have known, in another sense they did not know, could not afford to know, for their own sake.¹⁴⁵

Coetzee defines such an attitude as “willed ignorance,”¹⁴⁶ which Aaltola defines as “a self-ordained unwillingness to pay attention.”¹⁴⁷ Costello argues that the conduct of those who witnessed Nazi abuses yet failed to acknowledge them as crimes and respond is morally questionable. As she claims, “[u]nder the circumstances of Hitler’s kind of war, ignorance may have been a useful survival mechanism, but that is an excuse which, with admirable moral rigor, we refuse to accept.”¹⁴⁸ In her opinion, the passiveness of Holocaust witnesses is improper not solely because of their failure to act but rather because they willingly refused to acknowledge the surrounding atrocity. Therefore, as she further argues, “a sickness of the soul [...] marked those citizens of the Reich who had committed evil actions, but also those who, for whatever reason, were in ignorance of those actions.”¹⁴⁹ Costello doubts whether people guilty of such ignorance can be recognized as moral. She regards them to be in a “state of sin.”¹⁵⁰ Accordingly, toward the end of her lecture, Costello argues:

We point to the Germans and Poles and Ukrainians who did and did not know of the atrocities around them. We like to think they were inwardly marked by the aftereffects of that special form of ignorance. We like to think that in their nightmares the ones whose suffering they had refused to enter came back to haunt them. We like to think they woke up haggard in the mornings and died of gnawing cancers.¹⁵¹

145 Ibid., 63-64.

146 Ibid., 64.

147 Aaltola, “Coetzee and Alternative Animal Ethics,” 123.

148 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 64.

149 Ibid.

150 Ibid.

151 Ibid., 80.

However, Costello doubts whether there has been any punishment for ignoring the Holocaust. She points to a similar ignorance with reference to the suffering of animals killed in slaughterhouses:

Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them.¹⁵²

Costello does not compare the victims of the Holocaust to slaughtered cattle. Rather, she equates the ignorance of Nazi death camps with today's indifference toward abattoirs. She parallels people's insensitivity to the other's suffering, not the suffering itself.

Costello argues that reasoning systems which dissimulate torment, be it human or animal, should be regarded as morally questionable. In this sense, she follows Kantian ethics, in particular the Formula of Universal Law, according to which one should act on such a maxim which could be willed as universally binding. Ignorance, especially ignorance of suffering, cannot be such a maxim. On the contrary, it marks a failure of moral reasoning, and it also means a deterioration of one's humanity. Amy Gutmann claims that the cause for the failure is people's limited empathy:

We have closed our hearts to animals, Costello concludes, and our minds follow our hearts (or, more strictly speaking, our sympathies). Philosophy, she argues, is relatively powerless to lead, or in any event to lead in the right direction, because it lags our sympathies. This places the burden on something other than our rational faculties, to which philosophy typically appeals.¹⁵³

Gutmann's juxtaposition of instrumentalist rationalism and emotionality is confirmed in the fifth Lesson of *Elizabeth Costello*, "The Humanities in Africa," in which Costello's sister, Blanche, a Catholic nun, argues that humanities have become irrelevant to life due

¹⁵² Ibid., 65.

¹⁵³ Amy Gutmann, "Introduction," in Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 4.

to the increasing influence of mechanical rationalism:

The *studia humanitatis* have taken a long time to die, but now, at the end of the second millennium of our era, they are truly on their deathbed. All the more bitter should be that death, I would say, since it has been brought about by the monster enthroned by those very studies as first and animating principle of the universe: the monster of reason, mechanical reason.¹⁵⁴

Rosemary Jolly, a scholar at the Pennsylvania State University, refers to the increasing role of instrumental reason as resulting from the emphasis on efficiency; she claims that “our sense of ourselves as human is radically undermined by our addiction to a cult of the rational – what Coetzee’s recent work identifies as an irrational fetishization of instrumentalization, a profoundly secular addiction to the god of efficiency.”¹⁵⁵ Coetzee can be deemed a Kantian due to the resonance between his rejection of efficiency as the ground of moral worth and Kant’s idea of hypothetical imperative, defined in the *Critique of Reason* as morally insufficient.

Coetzee can be perceived as a Kantian not only because of Costello’s references to the categorical imperative, or his emphasis on good will, but also because he perceives morality in relation to reason. Coetzee’s Kantianism is also discernible in Costello’s claim that excessive rationality can be conducive to a deterioration of morality. She identifies the deterioration in academia, which in her view eradicates emotions from the rationalistic discourse, thus making it mechanistic and impersonal. Animals are the victims of such rigid rationalism. Coetzee criticizes the instrumentalist approach to animals in his 1999 novel *Disgrace*.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 123 (emphasis original).

¹⁵⁵ Rosemary Jolly, “Going to the Dogs: Humanity in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, *The Lives of Animals*, and South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” in *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, ed. Jane Poyner (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 150.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Stephen Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 47-48.

4.10. *Disgrace*

David Lurie, a professor of romantic literature from the Cape Town Technical University, studies men of great passion and humor, including Byron, Wordsworth and Goethe. He scrutinizes their work trying to discover and emulate the secret of their exceptionality, yet due to his utilitarian and hedonistic rationalism, his efforts are futile as he seems unable to create a genuine love relationship. He also suffers because of his advancing age; once a womanizer, he presently finds it difficult to attract a woman. Frustrated, he begins to use the services of prostitutes; occasionally, he seduces his female students by intimidating them with his privileged position of an academic teacher. However, one of the seduced students, Melanie Isaacs, reports him to the authorities. He stands a trial, and having been charged with sexual harassment, he is expelled from the university. Disgraced, he travels to his daughter, Lucy, who runs a small farm in the South African Eastern Cape. At the beginning of the visit, he experiences an assault during which Lucy is raped; she becomes pregnant. Lurie is beaten and scorched. Although it is almost certain that the attackers are related to Lucy's neighbor Petrus, she refuses to press charges against them to the police. Lurie does not understand Lucy's decision, and he becomes even more confused when she accepts Petrus's offer of marriage. Lucy explains that she has made the decisions in order not to alienate herself from the local society. She refuses to abort the pregnancy.

After the rape, Lurie feels devastated; it seems as though Lucy's harm was more painful for him than his own burns. His trauma begins during the attack when, unable to save his raped daughter, he approaches "an edge of craziness."¹⁵⁷ He screams and "throws himself about, hurling out shapeless bellows that have no words behind them, only fear."¹⁵⁸ The horror is so intense that it makes Lurie reassess his views over women and their

¹⁵⁷ John Maxwell Coetzee, *Disgrace* (1999; London: Vintage, 2000), 97

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

subjectivity to man. He gradually abandons his instrumental view of women and becomes critical about the utilitarian rationalism which he uses to justify his abuses of other people. Ashamed of his previous conduct, he decides to visit the family of the student he harassed, the Isaacs, and to apologize for his abuse of her. He belittles himself, hoping for their forgiveness. During his visit, Melanie is absent. Significantly, despite her absence, Lurie and her parents decide about her private matter, as if her opinion were not important. At this point, Coetzee reveals that Lurie's instrumental patriarchalism is symptomatic of the whole society. Although he has already recognized the wrong of his former deeds, he has not yet discarded his tendency to patronize women, nor has he learnt to sympathize with them. Moreover, it seems that he still treats them as sexual objects. After the visit to the Isaacs, he attends a theatrical play with Melanie in one of the roles. Seeing her act on stage, he sexually fantasizes about her. Witnessing Lucy's trauma, Lurie still remains insensitive to the suffering of sexually abused women. It is noteworthy that the insensitivity persists in his rationalization of the rape on Lucy:

Too many people, too few things. What there is must go into circulation, so that everyone can have a chance to be happy for a day. That is the theory; hold to the theory and to the comforts of theory. Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant. That is how one must see life in this country: in its schematic aspect.¹⁵⁹

Lurie's rationalism is callous and unsympathetic, testifying to his unabated egoism. He theorizes the assault not to help Lucy but because it assuages his pain. It could be argued that he stifles the ache by theorizing it.

Lurie's visit to the Isaacs has a similar objective; he repents before them to assuage the remorse he feels for upholding the patriarchal model of female inferiority that has caused his daughter's harm. Lurie indulges in self-pity to dissimulate his feeling of guilt, at the same time, however, he takes pleasure in projecting himself as a reformed proponent of an

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

idealized world in which men do not rape women. His motives can be perceived as narcissistic and, considering his suffering after the assault, surprisingly hypocritical.

It is not until Lurie becomes emotionally attached to animals that his rationalism subsides, making him sympathize with others. The process begins when he engages as a help at a local vet surgery run by Bev Shaw, Lucy's friend. Initially, Lurie does not care about animals, treating them as consumable goods. He changes the attitude after having been almost literally placed in a position of an animal. After the attack, he visits Bev's surgery to have his scorchs tended and bandaged. During the treatment, he is touched by Bev's tenderness. He realizes that she is so kind because of her involvement with animals. He understands that animals are sensitive creatures, that they need sympathy and tenderness, and that people frequently harm them by treating them like inanimate objects. Accordingly, from an entirely selfish character, who perceived animals as nothing more than just a source of food, Lurie begins to sympathize with them. The sympathy soon emerges in other spheres of his life.

Throughout the novel, Lurie works on an opera about Byron's love affair in Italy. He writes it because he "wants to leave something behind,"¹⁶⁰ therefore, his operatic endeavor can be deemed as another manifestation of his narcissism. However, despite having well-researched the subject of the opera, i.e., George Byron's love affair with Teresa Guiccioli, Lurie struggles with writing. He proceeds with the story only when he abandons his rationally construed plot and follows his intuition. He soon realizes that he cannot adopt Teresa's perspective. He acknowledges that he will not write the opera because he is not able to feel the way a woman does; he only has a man's fantasy about female emotionality. Willing to be genuine, he finally acknowledges his failure and abandons the opera. However, the failure can be perceived as a success; Lurie has eventually come to terms with his limitations, without indulging in self-aggrandizing fantasies. Unlike a number of

160 Ibid., 63.

Coetzee's other characters, among them Michael K, Susan Barton, Elizabeth Curren, and Dostoevsky, Lurie manages to discard his narcissistic logic, and despite numerous difficulties, he finally acknowledges his own limitations. He learns to co-exist with people who differ from him. Contrary to Elizabeth Costello, who also recognizes the limits of rationalism but verges on a mental breakdown, Lurie gradually appears to regain peace in life.

It is worthwhile mentioning that Coetzee criticizes self-serving rationalism from the beginning of the novel. Before his expulsion, Lurie criticized academia for abandoning its humanistic ideals of universal education and, instead, concentrating on applied sciences. The change is visible in the new name of Lurie's university. It used to be called the Cape Town University, but its name has been changed to the Technical University of Cape Town. The renaming is not merely symbolic; on the contrary, it is followed by a significant fall in the amount of humanistic courses and a simultaneous increase of the technical ones. In the newly rationalized university, Lurie is left with only one weekly lecture in English literature. Apart from that, he teaches communication skills, which he finds tedious and indicative of a qualitative decline in tertiary education. In his view, the decline follows from the fact that university has abandoned its mission to develop sensitivity, interests, and to broaden people's horizons, instead, concentrating on teaching practical skills and technicalities. He justifies the change with the "great rationalization"¹⁶¹ of contemporary world according to which spiritual erudition is replaced with money and financial gain. Academia adjusts to the change by offering technical courses because they will ensure it with a larger enrollment of students and a steady flow of money.

Lurie's trial is an example of academia's decline in its humanistic ideals. Faced with the university disciplinary committee, Lurie pleads guilty for abusing Melanie. He is ready to apologize to her, yet he refuses to repent for the deed in public. As he argues, a public

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

statement is not required by the law, and he finds it preposterous to demand it from him:

I have said the words for you, now you want more, you want me to demonstrate their sincerity. That is preposterous. That is beyond the scope of the law. I have had enough. Let us go back to playing it by the book. I plead guilty. That is as far as I am prepared to go.¹⁶²

Lurie refuses to make a public contrition, nor does he agree to undergo a therapy for sexually abusive people, which results in his expulsion from the university. He is defeated but in his view the defeat is heroic as, despite pressure, he remains true to his ideals. By maintaining that the committee's demands are exaggerated, Lurie relativizes his guilt; he emphasizes that the committee cannot verify the frankness of his statement. He exposes their inconsistency in the following passage: "I am being asked to issue an apology about which I may not be sincere?"¹⁶³ However, considering the causes for the "great rationalization" of academia, it appears that the committee urges Lurie to acknowledge his fault in public to save the university's reputation, thus ensuring that new students apply and provide it with funding. Accordingly, Coetzee discredits the order of reason, represented by academia, by showing that it perverts the idea of genuine morality for financial gain. Through Lurie's dissent, the novelist embraces the notion that no-one can be forced or bribed to be moral because morality derives from an internal want. As Kant claimed, morality must be a maxim of one's good will, not an external imposition; otherwise, it will only be a pretense.¹⁶⁴

Another symptom of the "great rationalization" of the humanistic discourse is Lurie's university's technical attitude toward language. Lurie is dissatisfied with the definition of language he finds in his course book: "[h]uman society has created language in order that we may communicate our thoughts, feelings, and intentions to each other."¹⁶⁵ In his

¹⁶² Ibid., 55.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 58.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Elleke Boehmer, "Sorry, Sorrier, Sorriest: The Gendering of Contrition in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," in Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, 137.

¹⁶⁵ Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 3-4.

opinion, the definition is mechanistic and reductive because it designates language as a system of rules and structures describable in technical metalanguage, which disregards language as a means of poetic expression. Lurie regrets such a rationalization of language; he prefers the romantic view that language comes from songs: “the origins of speech lie in song, and the origins of song in the need to fill out with sound the overlarge and rather empty human soul.”¹⁶⁶ Although Lurie does not express the view publicly, he still thinks that the academic definition of language is “preposterous,”¹⁶⁷ implying that the progressing technicization of academic curricula is to hide the fact that university does not fit the market economy, and by abandoning its original mission to cultivate universal knowledge, it loses its unique character and gets estranged.

By negating the changes, Lurie might be dissimulating his inability to adapt to the new realities of higher education by rationalizing it as a defiance mechanism against the new reality. Coetzee depicts Lurie’s obsolescence through his attitude to Wordsworth’s poetry, especially to the Mont Blanc poem. Basing on Lurie’s interpretation of the poem, it can be claimed that he particularly admires Wordsworth’s skill at mitigating real life difficulties through poetry. Lurie recognizes that, just like Kant in the *Critique of Judgement*, Wordsworth employs reason not solely to exceed the limitations of the senses, but mainly to produce a convincing fantasy of the outside world so that its alienating reality becomes more approachable. Lurie’s praise for Wordsworth stems from his desire to reinvent his own situation as more promising, and also to render the “post-Christian, posthistorical, postliterate”¹⁶⁸ university less displaced toward spiritless rationalism.

Lurie justifies his immoralities in a similar fashion. Not only does he explain his sexual abuses with claims about being under the influence of Eros, but he also compares himself to his former neighbors’ dog which could not renounce its sexual instincts, even

166 Ibid., 4.

167 Ibid., 3.

168 Ibid., 32.

despite being beaten. In this manner, Lurie presents his abusive promiscuity as innate in the male nature, implying that he should not be held responsible for his encroachments on his lovers' privacy. Another implication of the reasoning is that to condemn Lurie for his sexual behavior is not only unnatural but also unjust to him as a man. From this perspective, his defiance might look praiseworthy, while in Wordsworthian terms, it might even appear sublime. Instead, Lurie abuses Wordsworth to justify his lack of sympathy, especially toward the women he has harmed. He also rationalizes his cynicism, presenting himself as an object of pity, while denying it to his victims. Accordingly, Lurie leaves Cape Town, feeling wronged by people's lack of understanding for him.

The assault experienced at his daughter's farm undermines his idealized vision of himself. According to Lucy, the rapists were motivated by sexual lust. She claims that they were behaving like dogs on heat. They were not in full control of themselves. She claims that they raped her in order to satisfy their sexual urge. Lurie finds her explanation disturbing because it likens him to the rapists. Clearly enough, Lucy's account of the rapist's motivations is almost identical with the reasoning he provides before the university committee to justify his own sexual abuses. He has also compared himself to a mating dog. Eventually, he rejects his daughter's explanation, arguing that the assault was a vengeance for apartheid. However, by denying Lucy's "naturalistic" explanation, Lurie undermines the reasoning with which he excuses his promiscuity. The romanticized vision of himself as being guided by the god of love turns out to be self-contradictory.

Lurie's inconsistencies multiply when he refuses to accept Petrus's proposal to get married with Lucy. Although Petrus explains it as a protective means against future attacks, Lurie interprets the offer as a blackmail. Lurie seems scandalized by his neighbor's unromantic attitude to love. He scolds Petrus for reducing love to business, a contractual affair resembling a trade deal. However, Lurie's condemnation of Petrus is

inconsistent with his own attitude to love. Not only does he pay for prostitute services, but he also wants to compensate Melanie's discomforts by qualifying her exams regardless of her actual score. In this respect, Lurie's conduct parallels Petrus's. They are both hypocrites and, despite their noble declarations, neither of them pays much attention to women and their feelings. Instead, they concentrate on their own profits. By denying the marriage, Lurie strives to save his own reputation, apparently forgetting that, in the post-apartheid realities of South Africa, it is Lucy who suffers disgrace by getting married to Petrus. Lurie is more interested in securing his own biased worldview than in preventing Lucy's loss of the house and the rest of her property. Lurie and Petrus are both cynics, interested almost solely in satisfying their own materialistic goals.¹⁶⁹

Lurie's hypocrisy could also be spotted in his sympathy for animals. By sympathizing with the unwanted dogs from Bev's clinic, he might indirectly be sympathizing with himself; it could also be a form of self-pity. He tends them because they, like himself, are abandoned and displaced, and the source of their misery is their uncontrolled drive to proliferation. His preoccupation with animals would thus be another iteration of his narcissistic nature. Selfish motivations can also be identified in his preoccupation with dog corpses. Lurie collects dead dog bodies at Bev's clinic and burns them at a close incinerating facility. He does it to make sure that the corpses are burnt without being beaten for more convenient feeding into the incinerator. However, the ritual of watching the incinerations might be a form of self-ennoblement. Lurie takes care of burning the dog corpses, a task that no-one else wants to do, thus distinguishing himself as a martyr. Similarly to Elizabeth Curren, who seeks recognition by taking care of drunkard Vercueil, he satisfies his narcissistic wish of exceptionality with a self-ordained care for burnt animals.

The above criticism against Lurie also reminds of Norma's charge against Costello.

169 Masłoń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 179-180.

According to Norma, her mother-in-law refrains from eating meat not for ethical reasons, but to express her self-distinction. Her campaign for vegetarianism could thus be interpreted as a projection to dissimulate her narcissism. One of the causes for Costello's approaching nervous breakdown is because she cannot disprove, even before herself, that her daughter-in-law is mistaken. The charges against Lurie are less direct, although his daughter accuses him of forcing her into his self-ordained narrative. Similarly to Costello, Lurie is confused about his devotion to dead dog corpses:

Why has he taken on this job? To lighten the burden on Bev Shaw? For that it would be enough to drop off the bags at the dump and drive away. For the sake of the dogs? But the dogs are dead; and what do dogs know of honour and dishonour anyway?¹⁷⁰

Lurie scolds himself for attaching much attention to burning corpses, eventually realizing that he does it for himself, or as already argued, to identify with his ideal self. And since the vision of his ideal self involves "a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing,"¹⁷¹ it can be argued that Lurie's care for burning dog bodies without previously disfiguring them is another symptom of his narcissistic tendency to project his views onto others.

As in Costello's case, Coetzee might be using Lurie's narcissistic preoccupation with dogs to expose the limits of self-serving rationalism. Lurie feels lost because his self-ordained rationality cannot account for his feelings; a symptom of the inability is when he qualifies his sensitivity to animals as "stupid."¹⁷² The qualification reminds of the Kantian claim that harm cannot be a precept of reason, especially when it is motivated by pleasure or financial gain. Yet the precept is violated by the meat economy. As already noted, barely anyone needs meat for healthy life, especially in the affluent West where meat can

¹⁷⁰ Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 146.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

easily be replaced with other foods, without any harm to health. Despite its needlessness, however, most people eat meat, with the West leading in its consumption. The cause for extensive use of meat is because it is tasty, cheap, and easily available. In this sense, eating meat violates the categorical imperative; one cannot will that hurting other beings for pleasure or convenience become a universal law. Admittedly, comfort is not morally acceptable as a justification for another's suffering, be it human or animal. It is also impossible for reason to explain meat consumption without deeming most of human population morally degenerated. In order to dissimulate the degeneration and, as Costello argues, to project itself as total, reason conceals the above impossibility by projecting animal harm as ethically spurious. Costello refers to the above dissimulation as willed ignorance. She maintains that in its scale willed ignorance surpasses the Holocaust. Devastated by the above comparison, she eventually approaches emotional breakdown. It can be argued that Lurie's disqualification of his sentiment to animals as "stupid" is a symbol of a similar deceptive projection. At the same time, however, the disqualification testifies to the reality of the projection, hence to the limitedness of reason. Apparently, in *Disgrace*, Coetzee demonstrates reason's mystifications of people's immorality on the example of Lurie's narcissistic preoccupation with dead dogs.

The pairing of Lurie and Costello might also involve the DOG-GOD pun from "At the Gate." By comparing himself to dogs, not only does Lurie project himself as a martyr, but considering the above pun, he may also project himself as a godlike figure superior to people and other beings. His identification with dogs, although alienating, is another form of self-elevation. However, the way he treats his beloved dog, Driepoot, puts into question such perverse motivations. Throughout the plot, Lurie grows attached to the animal, and he even considers inscribing it into his opera. However, towards the end of the novel, he consents to euthanizing him. Although apparently insensitive, the decision to sacrifice

Driepoot is liberating for Lurie; by letting the dog die, he abandons all the self-ennobling fantasies that he has mediated through his engagement with unwanted dogs. Similarly to Costello, for whom the indifference of the Dulgannon frogs means genuineness, Lurie decides to sacrifice Driepoot to get rid of the self-cajoling rationalizations which he has been projecting on him and also on dogs. This seemingly callous gesture should be interpreted as a symptom of Lurie's moral advancement. At the beginning, Lurie is like Dostoevsky, a ruthless and calculating cynic, but towards the end of the novel, due to his involvement with animals, he learns about the limitations of his rationalism, and he strives for genuineness and truth.

Coetzee's understanding of the man-animal relation reminds of Kant's ethics, according to which people should respect animals because a proper treatment of animals leads to a better treatment of humans. It is his involvement with animals that makes Lurie rediscover and appreciate "what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love."¹⁷³ He first learns to love the animals he tends, then, towards the conclusion of the novel, he transfers the feeling onto people. A symptom of that internal evolution is when Lurie sees visibly pregnant Lucy working in the garden and he is amazed at the sight; he seems hopeful about himself being a grandfather. When Lucy spots him and invites him for tea, as if he were a mere visitor, he feels at peace with both himself and the world. His love for Lucy shows through his acceptance of her decisions, of who she wants to be and what to do with her body, without limiting her freedom. As he admits, these values, central to Kantian ethics, constitute "a new footing, a new start"¹⁷⁴ for him and, judging by the tone of the novel, for post-apartheid South Africa.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Ibid., 219.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 218.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Lucy Graham, "Yes, I am Giving Him Up': Sacrificial Responsibility and Likeness With Dogs in JM Coetzee's Recent Fiction," *Scrutiny* 27, no. 1 (2002): 4-15.

4.11. *Slow Man*

Lurie may be considered successful in the sense that he recognizes his shortcomings and learns to face it in search for genuineness. In *Slow Man* (2005), Coetzee depicts a similar type of struggle, although with a reverse result. The novel begins when Paul Rayment, an aging photographer, has a road accident. Due to the injuries, he has his right leg amputated. Although there is enough bone left to wear prosthesis and walk without help, he refuses to wear it. On the one hand, he does so because, like Lurie, he wants to project himself as a subject of pity, thus revealing his narcissistic nature. On the other hand, however, he might not have accepted his injury and, striving to dissimulate it, he acts as if his body were still full. As a way of rationalizing the self-deception, he compares himself to Venus of Milo. Although the sculpture is handless, Rayment imagines that the model who posed for it had both her hands intact. He fantasizes that he is like the model, that is, his body may be impaired, but behind the visible, i.e., the bodily, there is a healthy person. The above interpretation is confirmed in the following excerpt: “the accident has done nothing to his [Rayment's] image of himself.”¹⁷⁶ Accordingly, persisting in the fantasy of his corporeal intactness, Rayment identifies himself with the image of his ideal self and, similarly to Lurie, he tries to convince others to such a self-projection.¹⁷⁷

The main addressee of Rayment's projections is his Balkan nurse, Marijana Jokič. He is attracted to her because of her kindness, and also because she does not seem to judge him by his handicap. It could be claimed that her treatment of him is adjusted to his self-image. Therefore, willing to earn her trust and, at the same time, making her feel indebted to him, he decides to help her son, Drago, out of trouble with the law. She complies, and

¹⁷⁶ John Maxwell Coetzee, *Slow Man* (2005; London: Vintage, 2006), 54.

¹⁷⁷ Masłoń, *Père-Versions of the Truth*, 204.

he soon begins to idealize her and her family. He pictures her as a model of motherly love and female gentleness; he also wants to write a ballad of her son. Gradually, however, his idealizations decline into a melodrama; he realizes his pretentiousness, especially with reference to Drago:

Save him from what? He cannot say, not yet. But Drago above all he wants to save. Between Drago and the lighting-bolt of the envious gods he is ready to interpose himself, bare his own breast.¹⁷⁸

Rayment seems to perceive himself in heroic categories. Only later does he admit that his idealization of Drago and himself as his protector is “mad.”¹⁷⁹

He experiences substantial distress when Marijana rejects his love advances. His fantasies collapse, followed by a disintegration of the rationalizations on which he has based the image of himself. Disillusioned and afraid of being perceived as a “lesser man,”¹⁸⁰ Rayment begins to pile abuse on his body. He speaks of it as the source of all his misfortunes, both present and future. At this point, he resembles Eugene Dawn, for whom body is an obstacle, a hindrance to pure reason. However, unlike the protagonist of *Dusklands*, instead of laboring on his betterment, Rayment considers killing himself. The decision about the suicide seems for him a result of a rational calculation. Rayment sees no future perspectives for himself. The only reason why he eventually does not commit suicide is because he indulges in another fantasy of Drago; he is ready to pay for his education. Yet when he finds out that Drago has meddled with his collection of historically valuable photos, authored by world-acclaimed nineteenth-century photographer Antoine Fauchery (1823-1861), he becomes furious with the Jokič family. His affection for Marijana disappears; he soon associates her and her family with the stereotypical image of Gypsy thieves. He accuses the Jokičs of ingratitude.

¹⁷⁸ Coetzee, *Slow Man*, 72-73.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 73.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 113.

Judging by his panic at Drago's damage to the ancient photographs, it can be argued that Rayment attaches substantial value to the collection. As he explains at some point, he plans to leave it to the Australian nation in his will, hoping that the gift will earn him recognition and admiration. In this sense, the Fauchery photographs symbolize his narcissism; they represent the idealized image of himself as a valuable citizen who contributes to the cultural development of the country. Therefore, when the Faucherys are spoiled, he overreacts for fear of losing the source of his self-esteem. It also means that he lacks a sense of internal worth, extrapolating it on external objects, among them his photographic collection. It could be argued that Rayment extrapolates it also on the Jokičs; he helps them financially and legally to gain their recognition and to improve his own self-esteem.

When all of the external sources fail in securing his self-esteem, Rayment reacts in exaggerated ways, that is, either he wants to kill himself or he offends the only people who seem to care for him. According to Woessner, the reaction is a symptom of Rayment's "overdependence on the prosthesis of reason [which] has made [him] emotionally unsteady"¹⁸¹ and unable to approach others with consideration and sympathy. Significantly, unlike Lurie, who learns love after accepting his drawbacks, the protagonist of *Slow Man* follows Eugene Dawn, a paranoiac rationalist, and replaces love for others with rationalization of his self love. It can be argued that Rayment is not only bodily but also emotionally deformed, evincing the claim that "exclusively rational existence leads to emotional deformation."¹⁸²

Devastated by Drago's damage, Rayment declines in self-pity. Costello, who enters in the mid-plot, claims that Rayment's self-absorbed unhappiness is a symptom of his spiritual shallowness. In her view, Rayment is not attractive as a personality; he is

181 Woessner, "Coetzee's Critique of Reason," 225.

182 Ibid., 226.

excessively melodramatic, devoid of a distance to himself. Although he pictures himself in heroic situations, she claims that he would not serve as a source for an interesting protagonist. In consequence, Rayment avoids Costello. Calling her a devilish woman, he criticizes her for constantly urging him to reinvent himself. Referring to the idea of childbirth, she asks him to “push,”¹⁸³ implying a need of symbolic rebirth. She prompts him to take action, shed his pretentious fantasies and be genuine. However, despite the encouragement, Rayment does not take the advice, even when Costello teases him by saying that stories like his are “two a penny,”¹⁸⁴ that is, caricatural and unconvincing. Costello urges Rayment to be at least like Dostoevsky from *The Master of Petersburg*: determined to produce a convincing story of himself even at the price of his reputation. However, as his hysterical reaction to Drago’s manipulations of the Faucherys suggests, Rayment is not capable of skillful fabrication. Consequently, disappointed, Costello abandons him.

The last scene of the novel might prove Costello wrong to dismiss Rayment so fast. After dealing with Costello, Rayment receives a surprising gift from the Jokičs; it is a bike adjusted for lame people. He knows that the device is expensive and that Marijana and her family must have spent much of their savings to purchase it. Touched by their disinterested kindness, he sits on the bike and rides it for a while. It seems that, under the influence of people’s goodness, Rayment finally sheds his fabrications and begins to transform himself, which would mean approaching others without pretense, and accepting his disability. However, his gratitude for the bike soon turns out to be another pretense. It is implied that he accepts the vehicle to please the nurse’s family, and when they are gone, he will never use it again. Like Dostoevsky, Rayment prefers his fantasies to actual people; he decides to dwell on his idealized image of himself, even though it is worth less than “two a penny.” Accordingly, due to his unabated preference for his own vision of himself, Rayment

183 Coetzee, *Slow Man*, 204.

184 Ibid., 82.

should be regarded as deeply narcissistic figure, incapable of emulating Lurie's purification at killing Driepoot.

The question is whether Rayment can influence retroactive interpretation of facts. Coetzee discredits such a possibility as contradictory. Rayment may deceive himself that his body is not handicapped. He may even make the Jokič family think that he has accepted his predicament, but no rationalization can dissimulate the objective reality of his handicap. The bodily is not manipulatable at any circumstances; it may be ignored, but it will never cease being an undeniable fact of existence. Clearly, on Rayment's example, Coetzee criticizes reason for disregarding the body, its reality and sensations. Similarly to Kant, he claims that reason without the input of actual bodily experience verges on confabulation and error. In the Kantian philosophy, the approach of confirming transcendental ideas with empirical factuality is called empirical rationalism; within its paradigm, ideas without empirical content are “empty words,” and as such they cannot be employed in rational discourse for they may falsify its claims. Admittedly, the fantasies of Dostoevsky, Curren, and Rayment compromise reason because they lack confirmation in real life, they are mere projections, therefore, they fail, both in ethical and in cognitive terms. In *Slow Man*, Coetzee inscribes in Kantian ethical thought by exposing and criticizing the disaccord between ideas and empirical facts.

4.12. *Diary of a Bad Year* and *The Childhood of Jesus*

In the two remaining novels, Coetzee approaches animal ethics as one of the issues in the debate about the role of fiction in stimulating people's sensitivity to the surrounding world. In *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), Coetzee discusses poetic language and its application in manipulating the truth. By depicting the main protagonist, a character called JC, as an

explicit projection of himself, Coetzee examines the role of literature “at evocation of the real,”¹⁸⁵ thus testing the limits of realism in fiction. He also expresses some political opinions; following *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee exposes the West’s interest in sustaining the image of terrorists as the new barbarians. He maintains that such an image legitimizes the US authorities to conduct their policy of aggression and worldwide control. Coetzee is critical about today’s civilian societies, especially those inhabiting the West, as they allow for violence if done in their own interest. In order to conceal their immoralities, the societies rationalize violence as necessary for self-protection or for defending their values, among them freedom and democracy. He finds the assent morally disturbing. Also, such rationalizations parallel the justifications of animal abuse; they are used to dissimulate the inability of contemporary reason to account for violence, either toward people or animals, without falling into contradiction.

It can thus be claimed that the world as perceived by Coetzee is paranoid. People manipulate media coverage, they often produce fiction to rationalize their behavior or to understand the conduct of others, and rarely do they reciprocate kindness as they are unable to determine its genuineness. Coetzee maintains that most of Western societal relations are based on rationalized pretense, reproduced and popularized by media, and accepted because of their ubiquitous presence. The worlds of politics, economics, and the Internet are based on fictions, creating identity and meaning through adequately tailored narratives served to the masses under the semblance of truth. The purpose of such imitations is not solely to create an idealized vision of oneself, but mainly to rationalize and distribute the idealized self-image to others, in hope for admiration. Narcissistic pleasure is thus the core of today's rationalizations.

Consequently, as JC maintains, “in criticism suspiciousness is the chief virtue.”¹⁸⁶ No

185 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* (London: Harvill Secker, 2007), 192.

186 Ibid., 33.

meaning is assured. As argued in “Realism,” the first Lesson of *Elizabeth Costello*, meaning is no longer stable; it fluctuates depending on the context, the current language game or the way it is narrated to the public. It follows that in the times devoid of grand metanarratives, without strict rules demarcating the limits of the truth, moral lassitude seems unavoidable. Therefore, people accept tamed violence, not because they want it, but rather because they do not recognize it as violence. Arguably, an example of such tamed violence is the treatment of animals. As Coetzee depicts in chapter fourteen of *Diary of a Bad Year*, “On the Slaughter of Animals,” animals are killed in increasing numbers, with more and more elaborate methods of their slaughter, because people do not recognize animal suffering as ethically important, essentially due to the rationalistic logic which projects animal atrocity as insignificant. Such a projection serves reason because it conceals its inability to account for animal abuse in rational terms, without undermining its idealized vision as all-encompassing. Consequently, although Coetzee’s main ambition in *Diary of a Bad Year* is not strictly connected with animals, he still criticizes the societal mechanisms aestheticizing the unethical, of which the maltreatment of animals is an important but unappreciated aspect. For Coetzee, as for Derrida, the animal is caught in between appearance and reality, and its moral status is subject to interpretation, meaning that a successful animal ethics should determine how animals are represented and perceived. Coetzee perceives literature as a means for sensitizing people to animals and for popularizing animal ethics.¹⁸⁷

In his 2013 novel, *The Childhood of Jesus*, Coetzee abandons his preoccupation with animal ethics and, instead, develops the themes which appeared in *Diary of a Bad Year*. In particular, he revisits the founding stories of Western civilization. Exposing the conventional nature of such stories, he retells the story of Jesus, placing it in contemporary setting, therefore, estranging it from its usual religious context. While a deconstruction of

187 Cf. Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee*, 90-94.

the West's fundamental myths does pertain to ecocriticism, the issues raised in Coetzee's last novels exceed animal ethics, at least in the scope adopted in the present thesis. Suffice to say that both *Diary of a Bad Year* and *The Childhood of Jesus* continue the themes of Coetzee's former works. In particular, they explore the abuses of manipulative rationalizations. *Diary of a Bad Year* constitutes a treatise on fiction, whereas *The Childhood of Jesus* probes into the fictive origins of reality. In either of them, Coetzee extends the limits of narration, encouraging his audience to rethink the reliability of rational insight and other grand narratives of contemporary thought paradigms. The issues connected with animals are addressed mainly in *Life and Times of Michael K*, *The Lives of Animals*, *Elizabeth Costello*, and *Disgrace*.

Conclusion

From a Kantian viewpoint, the fantasies of Dostoevsky, Curren and Rayment compromise reason because they lack empirical confirmation; they are mere projections. In order to restore the balance between the rational and the empirical, there is a need of bodily experience, and it seems that for Coetzee an encounter with an animal fulfills that requirement. However, as argued by Derrida in his analysis of *l'animot*, the encounter is distorted by contemporary techno-materialistic reason which dissimulates animals as morally insignificant in order to uphold its privileged position in the rationalist discourse. Throughout his novels, Coetzee reveals and counters the dissimulation either by exposing the rationalist devaluation of non-rational modes of thinking, or by showing that reason is unable to justify violence, both to people and animals, without contradicting itself. The contradiction derives from the juxtaposition of rationalistic logic, which frequently allows for animal suffering, and Kantian ethics, according to which violence, abuse, and suffering cannot be maxims of reason. Coetzee exposes the limits of rational disquisition by

showing its dissimulations of animal suffering. The conclusion he eventually reaches is that the balance between reason and body can be achieved through emotional response, mediated among others by literature. In this sense, he endorses the idea of Martha Nussbaum, an acclaimed American philosopher, according to whom “emotions make knowledge meaningful.”¹⁸⁸ It seems then that for Coetzee emotions substantiate knowledge in a similar manner as sensual experience validates knowledge in Kant. Coetzee seems to follow Kant also in the sense that they both investigate the structure of reason, they analyze its formal aspects, the conditions of its validity, without establishing its actual contents. They both argue that pure rationality does not suffice to gain valid insight into the nature of world, nor is it enough to assume morally proper attitudes toward its non-rational dwellers. Accordingly, Coetzee may be perceived as a Kantian thinker because he argues that valid cognition requires more than pure rationality or sole sensibilities. In his work, Coetzee emphasizes the role of the paralogical modes of thinking, focusing in particular on sympathetic imagination. The ensuing chapter will investigate his approach to the sympathetic imagination from the perspective of animal ethics.

188 Aaltola, “Coetzee and Alternative Animal Ethics,” 124.

Chapter V

The Sympathetic Imagination and Coetzee's Wider Conception of Rationality

In the previous chapter, the focus was on Coetzee's critique of rationality, especially academic reason and the associated praise for rationalistic logic. The following chapters investigate Coetzee's claim that the inability of reason to account for non-rational modes of thinking can partially be compensated by the sympathetic imagination. It is argued that Coetzee's approach to reason parallels Kant's idea of discursiveness, according to which valid understanding combines rationality and empirical sensibility, including emotions as derivatives of aesthetic judgement. The ensuing chapters also employ the logic of Kant's transcendental illusion to explain Coetzee's use of the sympathetic imagination as a basis of valid animal ethics. Other references to Kant involve the notion of reciprocity, developed in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, disinterestedness and elements of Kant's pedagogy and aesthetics, described in the third *Critique*. The tenet of the following analysis is Kant's idea that morality is a precept of reason, and that Coetzee includes animal ethics in the precept by designating the sympathetic imagination as part of reason. Before discussing the origins of the sympathetic imagination, however, it is worth relating Coetzee's extended conception of rationality to Kant's idea of dialectical reason.

5.1. Coetzee's Wider Conception of Rationality

Coetzee's main charge against reason is its reliance on thought experiments and the rationalistic denial of such modes of cognition as bodily experience, emotions and aesthetic sensitivity. Through the persona of Elizabeth Costello, he argues that rationalism represents "a rather narrow self-regenerating intellectual tradition whose forte is reasoning, in the same way that the forte of chess-players is playing chess, which for its own motives it tries to install at the center of the universe."¹ Therefore, as Martin Woessner argues, in Coetzee's work "reason is no more than a specialized language game,"² a type of self-affirming "jargon"³ unable to account for phenomena exceeding rationalistic logic, among them death, the Holocaust, and the moral status of animals. According to Dominic Head, Coetzee undermines narcissistic admiration for reason by making his readers "uneasy about the self-interest implicit in humanist reason and rationality [and] in another unsettling manoeuvre, he takes us beyond a straightforward rational and literal engagement with the arguments."⁴ Both Woessner and Head claim that Coetzee's objection to rationalism is not an attack on reason *per se* but rather a critique of self-righteous rationality.⁵

It can be argued that Coetzee does not reject reason entirely. On the one hand, he defies the rationalistic discourse, as in the following claim by Costello:

I want to find a way of speaking to fellow human beings that will be cool rather than heated, philosophical rather than polemical [...]. Such a language is

¹ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 25.

² Martin Woessner, "Coetzee's Critique of Reason," in *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics: Philosophical Perspectives on Literature*, ed. Anton Leist and Peter Singer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 239.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dominic Head, "A Belief in Frogs: J. M. Coetzee's Enduring Faith in Fiction," in *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, ed. Jane Poyner (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006), 110.

⁵ Cf. Richard Alan Northover, *J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy*, (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2009), 6-7, 18, <http://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/24686/00front.pdf?sequence=1>.

available to me, I know. It is the language of Aristotle and Porphyry, of Augustine and Aquinas, of Descartes and Bentham, of, in our day, Mary Midgley and Tom Regan. It is a philosophical language [...]. I could fall back on that language, as I have said, in the unoriginal, secondhand manner which is the best I can manage [However, b]oth reason and seven decades of life experiences tell me that reason is neither the being of the universe nor the being of God [...]. And if this is so, if that is what I believe, then why should I bow to reason this afternoon and content myself with embroidering on the discourse of the old philosophers?⁶

On the other hand, however, Coetzee mediates Costello's rejection of reason with the following remark by the character Elaine Marx:

In your lecture [yesterday] you argued that various criteria – Does this creature have reason? Does this creature have speech? – have been used in bad faith to justify distinctions that have no real basis, between Homo and other primates, for example, and thus to justify exploitation. [...] Yet the very fact that you can be arguing against this reasoning, exposing its falsity, means that you put a certain faith in the power of reason, of true reason as opposed to false reason.⁷

Apart from Elaine Marx, Costello's criticism of reason is moderated by other characters in *The Lives of Animals*, among them professor O'Hearne, Costello's daughter-in-law Norma, and Costello's son John.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, Coetzee frequently exposes the disadvantages of abandoning rational disquisition. In *Dusklands*, hyper-rationality leads Eugene Dawn to an emotional breakdown and crime. The main protagonist of *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), Magda, tries to rationalize the fact that she was raped by a black man, but because her explanation make her only more confused, she gradually withdraws into isolation and insanity. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Joll's lust for power makes him overestimate his warfare skills and as a result he misjudges the barbarian tactics. The primitivism of the titular protagonist of *Life and Times of Michael K* makes him approach death through physical emaciation. Vercueil, the black vagabond from *Age of Iron*, becomes almost dehumanized due to his preoccupation with the basic bodily needs and his disregard for the

6 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 22-23.

7 Ibid., 55.

needs of spirit and reason. In *Foe*, Cruso, an embodiment of capitalist reason, goes insane and eventually dies pursuing a utopia. The romantic idealist of *The Master of Petersburg*, Pavel, dies because of his devotion to the over-rationalized phantasm of egalitarian society. Finally, Elizabeth Costello, the main protagonist of *The Lives of Animals*, approaches a psychic breakdown having previously discarded rationality as limited and antagonistic to the sympathetic modes of insight. Referring to these cases, Anton Leist, a University of Zurich scholar, perceives Coetzee's view of reason in a typically Kantian manner: "if reasons were not allowed, orientation would be lost, and this would restrict freedom,"⁸ freedom being the necessary condition for self-sustainable rationality in Kant's thought.

Cora Diamond explains Coetzee's approach to reason by having recourse to Lyotardian paralogy, according to which in order to gain valid knowledge, rationality based on logic should be supplemented with forms of reasoning that do not necessarily conform to the rules of logic. Referring to Lyotard's praise for artistic sensitivity, she points to imagination, claiming that it can improve understanding by stimulating emotions, reciprocity, and the feeling of sympathy. As she argues, imagination is not limited by logics and, due to its receptiveness to non-conventional ways of thinking, imagination facilitates the understanding of the emotional states of other people. It can also improve one's insight into animals' perspectives. Accordingly, imagination represents a paralogical mode of cognition, supplementing rather than contesting rational thinking.⁹

The concept of paralogy as approached by Diamond reflects Kant's claim that valid understanding requires reaching beyond pure rationality, that is, beyond what reason can cognize by itself. The need to extend rationalism while searching for the grounds of reason's self-certainty is the underlying thought of Kant's transcendental dialectics. As

8 Anton Leist, "Against Society, Against History, Against Reason: Coetzee's Archaic Postmodernism," in Leist and Singer, *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics*, 212.

9 Cf. Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).

noted in Chapter II, Kant designated empirical knowledge as the only reliable knowledge. He also argued that the conditions for the validity of empirical knowledge cannot be inferred from experience because of its contingent character. In order to establish such conditions, reason has to exceed experience; however, by moving beyond the realm of the empirical, reason exposes itself to error and illusion. In the section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled “Transcendental Dialectic,” Kant addressed the above predicament by claiming that there is a logic to the transgressions committed by reason. Referring to it as the logic of the transcendental illusion, he argued that in order to grant the universality of its own claims, reason *a priori* assumes the conditions of experience as necessarily universal, regardless of the empirical impossibility of verifying such an assumption. In a sense, reason becomes paralogical, but as long as the paralogy is presupposed by reason, the transcendental illusion is a rational operation of reason, thus within the scope of rationality. Kant claimed that the ability of reason to grant the validity of its own claims by providing a logic for the transcendental illusion is reason's greatest achievement.¹⁰

Coetzee's espousal of paralogical rationalism could also be explained in terms of Friedrich Nietzsche's praise for aesthetic judgement, an idea originating from the Kantian notion of aesthetic response to art and nature as improving one's morality and humanity. In his 1872 study *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche considered supplementing rationality with artistic imagination:

Have I been too ready to view what was unintelligible to me as being devoid of meaning? Perhaps there is a realm of wisdom, after all, from which the logician is excluded? Perhaps art must be seen as the necessary complement of rational discourse?¹¹

Arguing for the combination of the rational and the imaginative, Nietzsche claimed that

10 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (Hazleton: Pennsylvania State University Electronic Classic Series, 2010), 210-211.

11 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Double Day Anchor Books, 1956), 90.

the Platonic dialogue was the most suitable medium for the dialecticism of the rational and non-rational faculties. Accordingly, echoing the dialectical ideas of Kant, Coetzee concurs with Nietzsche by propagating a balance between reason and imagination, and “not by displacing reason.”¹²

It is noteworthy that Coetzee's praise for imagination corresponds with the paralogical dialectics of Karl R. Popper (1902-1994), an Austrian-British philosopher of science. Coetzee's argument echoes Popper's differentiation between uncritical and critical rationalism:

Uncritical or comprehensive rationalism can be described as [...] the principle that any assumption which cannot be supported either by argument or experience is to be discarded. Now it is easy to see that this principle of an uncritical rationalism is inconsistent; for since it cannot, in its turn, be supported by argument or experience, it implies that it should itself be discarded. [...] Uncritical rationalism is therefore logically untenable; and since a purely logical argument can show this, uncritical rationalism can be defeated by its own chosen weapon, argument. This criticism may be generalized. Since all argument must proceed from assumptions, it is plainly impossible to demand that all assumptions should be based on argument.¹³

Discussing the grounds of critical rationalism, Popper argues for the association of rational thought with imagination and humanitarianism. Both Popper and Coetzee condemn the Platonic idea of infallible reason; they admit the possibility of error, uncertainty of the truth, and eventually “that all knowledge is conjectural or hypothetical.”¹⁴

Coetzee is not a proponent of non-reason, but of a dialectical reason, reaching beyond self-contained rationalism and realizing the Kantian ideal of humanity. Coetzee evokes the Kantian overtone of his work in “Eros,” the seventh Lesson of *Elizabeth Costello*, by making his persona say the following:

12 Northover, *J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights*, 64.

13 Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2, *The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath* (1945; London: John Routledge and Sons, 1966), 217.

14 Northover, *J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights*, 120; see Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 264-265.

Are there other modes of being besides what we call human into which we can enter; and if there are not, what does that say about us and our limitations? She does not know much about Kant, but it sounds to her a Kantian kind of question. If her ear is right, then inwardness started its run with the man from Königsberg and ended, more or less, with Wittgenstein the Viennese destroyer.¹⁵

Coetzee echoes Kantian dialectics by enquiring about the possibilities of rational reflection regarding not only knowledge, but also moral sensitivity for the other, whether human or non-human. The role of the imagination is to assist reason in overcoming its deficiencies and achieving the Kantian ideal of validity in both epistemological and ethical terms.

Accordingly, Coetzee seems to agree with the Lyotardian claim that people need to go beyond purely rationalistic argumentation and supply it with paralogical modes of insight. However, unlike Lyotard, Coetzee does not claim that reason has compromised itself; rather, he argues that reason has reached a limit. The limit concerns the efficacy of argumentative thinking. Such phenomena as postmodern art, poetic expression, sympathy and also death, especially the Holocaust, turn out to be hardly explicable through rationalist analysis. The cause for the difficulty is the rationalistic preoccupation with logical clarity and linguistic coherence. To encompass the phenomena, reason ought to recognize non-rational ways of cognition, including paralogy in the cognitive process. This incorporation addresses Kant's key concern in the *Critique*, i.e., retaining the integrity of reason.

In "Realism," the first Lesson in *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee refers to the inefficiency of rationalistic logic in explaining reality. As he argues, it is no longer possible comprehensively to define certain phenomena because in the postmodernist reality meaning is created in the context; it is transitory. Accordingly, given the elusiveness of meaning, such issues as animal abuse and animal suffering can neither be easily "assimilated in the order of reason, [nor do they] involve the attainment of a stable position

15 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (2003; London: Vintage, 2004), 188.

of knowledge and a moral stance.”¹⁶ Instead, argues Ido Geiger, they necessitate reason “in its transitivity,”¹⁷ that is, combining paralogical means of insight with the traditional cause-effect logic.

In her analysis of Coetzee's work, Alice Crary claims that the combination of argument, understood as the type of reasoning deprived of any “propensity to engage our sensibilities,”¹⁸ and insights deriving from the sensibilities constitute “a *wider* conception of rationality.”¹⁹ As she argues, the “wider conception accommodates the possibility that a bit of discourse that appeals to our heart can as such contribute to rational understanding.”²⁰ In her view, Coetzee subscribes to the idea of wider rationality by recognizing sympathy as a faculty exceeding understanding. She bolsters the view with the following quote from *The Lives of Animals*: “heart is the seat of faculty, *sympathy*, that allows us to share at times the being of another.”²¹ Based on Crary's view, it could be claimed that Woessner exaggerates when claiming that, for Coetzee, “sympathy includes, whereas reason excludes.”²² Woessner's claim is mediated by Elisa Aaltola, who recognizes Coetzee's praise for the cognitive role of paralogical modes of thinking; she stresses that, according to Coetzee, instead “of theory and its concentration on principles and reason, poetry, virtues, emotion, and imagination should be prioritized [as they] can reveal new meanings.”²³ In his 1996 collection of essays entitled *Giving Offense*, Coetzee claims that one such new meaning could be delivered by placing reason in a position of powerlessness:

16 Ido Geiger, “Writing the Lives of Animals,” in Leist and Singer, *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics*, 158-159.

17 Geiger, “Writing the Lives of Animals,” 159.

18 Alice Crary, “J. M. Coetzee, Moral Thinker,” in Leist and Singer, *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics*, 250.

19 Crary, “J. M. Coetzee, Moral Thinker,” 251 (emphasis original).

20 Ibid.

21 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 34.

22 Woessner, “Coetzee's Critique of Reason,” 239 (emphasis original).

23 Elisa Aaltola, “Coetzee and Alternative Animal Ethics,” in Leist and Singer, *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics*, 141.

it [reason] can provide explanations for most things, and therefore – in its own terms, which can attach ultimate importance to being able to explain things [–] it cannot itself be the object of some other method of explanation more all-inclusive than itself. As the unframed framer, reason is a form of power with no in-built sense of what the experience of powerlessness might be like.²⁴

Accordingly, Coetzee does not exclude reason; he supplements it with paralogical types of insight. The supplementation seems to be a valuable asset in the world which Costello defines as destabilized by the proliferation of transient meanings.

The reason why Coetzee argues for a wider conception of rationality is to counteract the discontinuity of species begun by Cartesian dualism:

I would only want to say that the discontinuity he [Descartes] saw between animals and human beings was the result of incomplete information. The science of Descartes's day had no acquaintance with the great apes or with higher marine mammals, and thus little cause to question the assumption that animals cannot think. And of course it had no access to the fossil record that would reveal a graded continuum of anthropoid creatures stretching from the higher primates to *Homo sapiens* – anthropoids, one must point out, who were exterminated by man in the course of his rise to power.²⁵

For Coetzee, continuity is equivalent to embodiment: “[t]o thinking, cogitation, I oppose fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being [...] body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world. This fullness contrasts starkly with Descartes' key state, which has an empty feel to it: the feel of a pea rattling around in a shell.”²⁶ Coetzee does not reject reason itself but the abstract idea of reason as justifying the exclusion of non-human beings from moral consideration.

However, it can also be claimed that Coetzee strives to employ reason as the base of animal ethics. He referred to the idea of reason-based animal ethics in a 2006 interview for the Danish magazine *Satya*:

24 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (1996; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 4.

25 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 61.

26 Ibid., 33.

It is an enterprise in which we are increasingly making use of the faculty where we have an indubitable advantage over other creatures: the faculty of abstract thought. This age will be looked back on, I am convinced, as one in which huge steps were made in our thinking about relations between human and non-human living beings, in a range of fields from the philosophy of mind to ethics and jurisprudence. With such a flow of intellectual energy joining in with the practical energies of organizations like *Voiceless*, it is impossible to believe that we cannot effect a change in the present sad, sorry and selfish treatment of animals.²⁷

Coetzee's recourse to rational reflection as the power enabling animal ethics corresponds with the Kantian emphasis on reason's ability to transcend its own limitations. The role of literature is to facilitate the transcendence by stimulating the sympathetic imagination. Hilmar Heister explains Coetzee's literary engagement in prompting the sympathetic imagination in the following manner:

J. M. Coetzee's fictions demonstrate both how the author applies his sympathetic imagination in creating fictional characters or alter egos, who in turn illustrate either the failure or the application of their sympathetic imagination, and how the text guides the reader's sympathetic imagination, resulting in enhanced empathy.²⁸

Reflecting on his own task as a fiction writer, Coetzee evokes the allegory of Plato's cave: "I am someone who has intimations of freedom (as every chained prisoner has) and constructs representations – which are shadows themselves – of people slipping their chains and turning to the light."²⁹ According to Rita Barnard, a University of Pennsylvania scholar, Coetzee's literary output encourages a dialectical self-reflection among his readers and critics: "[if] Coetzee's fiction is in the main antipastoral and dystopian, then isn't our task as critics (following his own example) to read dialectically, to subvert the dominant, to discover in his work the utopian possibility, the pastoral impulse which cannot be

27 Coetzee, "Animals, Humans, Cruelty and Literature: A Rare Interview with J. M. Coetzee," *Satya*, May 04, 2006, <http://www.satyamag.com/may04/coetzee.html>.

28 Hilmar Heister, "The Sympathetic Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee: Empathy and Mirror Neurons in Literature" (PhD diss., Humboldt University of Berlin, 2015), 262, <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/dissertationen/heister-hilmar-2015-03-17/PDF/heister.pdf>.

29 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 340-341.

written directly.”³⁰ Coetzee refers to literature as a means of opening to non-conventional modes of thinking in his 2009 novel *Summertime*: “[a] book should be an axe to chop open the frozen sea inside of us.”³¹ It can be claimed that the purpose of Coetzee's dialectical extension of rationality over paralogical modes of perception is to know the other, whether human or non-human, and by following the Kantian ideal of humanity, to enhance one's own morality.³²

Coetzee implements the idea in one of his major works, *Disgrace*, in which Lurie's sympathetic insight into animal suffering is followed by his extended understanding and, partially, moral development. Considering the similarities between Coetzee and Kant, it is nevertheless important to underline that Coetzee does not reconstruct the Kantian structure of reason; rather, he follows Kant's approach to the interdependencies between particular parts of the cognitive apparatus. Accordingly, while they do not necessarily agree with each other as to what can be counted as a cognitive faculty, it could be claimed that Coetzee and Kant are in accord as to the faculties' discursiveness. For Kant, the parts making up cognitive apparatus are reason and experience, to which Coetzee adds the sympathetic imagination.

5.2. Coetzee and the Keatsian Understanding of the Sympathetic Imagination

Kant claimed that the additional and necessary component of knowledge was supplied by dialectical reason under the form of the transcendental illusion. Coetzee argues that such a component can also be furnished by imagination. He refers to the faculty which delivers

30 Rita Barnard, “Dream Topographies: J. M. Coetzee and the South African Pastoral,” in *The Writings of J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Michael Valdez Moses, special issue, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 93, no.1 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994): 54.

31 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Summertime* (London: Harvill Secker, 2009), 61.

32 Cf. Shameen Black, *Fiction Across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late-Twentieth-Century Novels* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 249-254.

the component as the sympathetic imagination. Coetzee adopts the term from John Keats (1795-1821), an English Romantic poet who, in a letter to Richard Woodhouse, dated 27 October, 1818, defined the sympathetic imagination as the ability of creatively “filling some other body.”³³ In this sense, the sympathetic imagination allows poets, artists and authors to internalize the perspectives of their characters, thus to present them in a more credible manner. As argues Walter Jackson Bate (1918-1999), an American literary critic of Keats’ poetry, the sympathetic imagination pursues the “essential character and reality [of the other through] instinctive but sagacious thought.”³⁴ Such a pursuit involves losing “one’s identity to gain a complete absorption into the other.”³⁵ According to Coetzee, apart from creative activity, the sympathetic imagination involves a benevolent and hospitable attitude toward reciprocating with otherness in real life, thus approaching the Kantian logic of the transcendental illusion, rather than its Keatsian understanding as a literary tool for engaging with the textual other.

It is worth mentioning that John Keats adopted the idea of the sympathetic imagination from Adam Smith (1723-1790), a Scottish social and economic thinker who, in his 1759 study *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, maintained that the origin of morality was the feeling of sympathy for others. Significantly, arguing against the abstract and mechanical rationalism of the Enlightenment, Smith emphasized the role of imagination in stimulating a sympathetic attitude toward other people:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is on the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the

33 John Keats to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818, in *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Grant Scott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 194.

34 Walter Jackson Bate, “The Sympathetic Imagination in Eighteenth-Century English Criticism,” *ELH* 12 (1945): 161.

35 Christine Sego Caldwell, *Imagining the Other: The Possibilities and Limits of the Sympathetic Imagination in J. M. Coetzee’s Recent Fiction* (master’s thesis, Bloomington: Indiana University, 2011), 30-31, <https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/bitstream/handle/1805/2710/thesis.pdf?sequence=1>.

imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination, we place ourselves in his situation.³⁶

According to Smith, despite being self-centered, people are naturally disposed to take pleasure in the happiness of others, or to sympathize with those in distress, whether actual or imagined. People's benevolent "interest in the fortunes of others"³⁷ was deemed by Smith to be a confirmation of people's innate morality, their self-interest being only a question of prudence. The correlation between ethics, sympathy and imagination was taken up by numerous Romantic poets, among them Lord Byron, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who similarly to John Keats promoted the idea of improving people's moral behavior by stimulating their imagination through art, especially poetry. The correlation was theorized by Edmund Burke (1729-1797), an Irish political thinker, who applied it to his study of the beautiful and the sublime, and by David Hume, Burke's contemporary, who employed it in his theory of moral sentiment in which he rejected reason as the basis of morality.³⁸ Immanuel Kant used the ideas advanced by Smith, Burke and Hume in his *Critique of Judgement* as the basis for his claim that aesthetic sensitivity both reflects and prompts moral character.³⁹

Coetzee draws upon the Romantic view of the sympathetic imagination. In "Realism," the main protagonist's son, John Bernard, extols his mother's ability to think her way into the other:

36 Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759; Mineola, NY: Dover Philosophical Classics, 2006), 3.

37 Ibid.

38 David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (London: John Noon, 1739-40), 295-304, 458, <http://www.davidhume.org/texts/thn.html>.

39 See John Whale, *Imagination under Pressure, 1789-1832: Aesthetics, Politics, and Utility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); cf. Wayne Waxman, "Kant's Debt to the British Empiricists," in *A Companion to Kant*, ed. Graham Bird (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

But my mother has been a man [...]. She has also been a dog. She can think her way into other people, into other existences. I have read her; I know. It is within her powers. Isn't that what is most important about fiction: that it takes us out of ourselves, into other lives?⁴⁰

The site of Costello's sympathetic imagination is literature; it manifests itself in her ability to engage her audience by creating compelling characters whose ingenuity induces not only interest but also self-reflection on the quality of one's moral outlook. As the following quote implies, John is amazed by Costello's sympathetic imagination: "[a]bout sex, about passion and jealousy and envy, she writes with an insight that shakes him."⁴¹ Although Costello's praise of literature is meant to criticize the rationalistic discourse, it can still be argued that philosophy also has a profound insight into the nature of being, if not more than any other discipline.

The extent of John's admiration is evinced by the fact that he compares Costello to one of the proponents of the sympathetic imagination: she is "[l]ike Keats, [...] the great advocate of blank receptiveness."⁴² Moreover, apart from helping to comprehend fictional characters, the sympathetic imagination improves the understanding of real-life beings, including people and animals. During the dinner ensuing her paper, Costello voices the following claim: "if I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life."⁴³ Since imagination enables an insight into fictional beings, argues Costello, it can also serve to understand animality.

Costello repeats the analogy when she evokes the role of imagination in understanding death. As in the case of fiction, she maintains that she "knows what it is like to be a corpse,"⁴⁴ not because of scientific research, but due to her ability to imagine her own

40 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 22-23.

41 Ibid., 5.

42 Ibid., 4.

43 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 35.

44 Ibid., 32.

death. She claims that people have access to such knowledge but do not realize it. She explains her point in the following passage:

All of us have such moments, particularly as we grow older. The knowledge we have is not abstract – ‘All human beings are mortal, I am a human being, therefore I am mortal’ – but embodied. For a moment we are that knowledge. We live the impossible: we live beyond our death, look back on it, yet look back as only a dead self can.⁴⁵

Interestingly, she defines death negatively, that is, as a lack of knowledge or as a paradox.

As the ensuing quote demonstrates, she finds it contradictory to be alive and, at the same time, to think of being dead:

What I know is what a corpse cannot know: that it is extinct, that it knows nothing and will never know anything anymore. For an instant, before my whole structure of knowledge collapses in panic, I am alive inside that contradiction, dead and alive at the same time.⁴⁶

Stephen Mulhall refers to Costello’s sense of confusion by claiming that “imagining yourself dead engenders a collapse of our whole structure of knowledge,”⁴⁷ whereas Cora Diamond approaches it as an aspect of the “difficulty of reality,” that is, “something in reality [...] resistant to our thinking it,”⁴⁸ and yet revealing an unknown aspect of it. As Diamond further claims, the difficulty can be overcome by imagination, not solely because it exceeds the horizon of human thinking, but mainly because it engenders sympathy, thus enhancing understanding. She refers to the cognitive function of imagination which “can capture moments of astonishing incomprehensibility.”⁴⁹ Diamond’s view seems to rely on Coetzee’s idea according to which “there are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination.”⁵⁰

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Stephen Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal: J. M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 47.

48 Cora Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” in *Philosophy and Animal Life*, ed. Cary Wolfe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 45–46.

49 Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” 62.

50 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 80.

Consequently, both Coetzee and Diamond approach the sympathetic imagination as a faculty not only allowing for a fictive insight into the other's mind but also extending one's understanding.⁵¹

According to Sam Durrant, a University of Leeds scholar, Costello's correlation between the ability to imagine one's own death and the capability of imagining the perspective of an animal is far-fetched, if not entirely mistaken. In his view, there is no connection between imagining oneself as a corpse and an insight into the being of animals, primarily because imagining animality necessitates a change of perspective, whereas death denies any perspective. The two positions are incommensurable, therefore, they cannot be perceived as the basis for any reliable conclusions on the nature of the sympathetic imagination. Interestingly, the argument of imagining one's own death recalls the tenet of Kant's view of the sublime; by imagining one's own death, reason emerges as triumphant for it proves itself capable of thinking beyond itself. A similar triumph of reason is evoked in the "Transcendent Dialectic," in which Kant presented reason as capable of conceiving and relating to its own non-existence. Accordingly, while not necessarily compatible, imagination and awareness of death should be praised because, as Durrant remarks, an awareness of one's limits is already a step toward exceeding them, both conceptually and imaginatively.⁵²

Drawing upon Durrant's view, it can be claimed that Costello opposes Kant, negating his transcendent application of reason. Yet her notion of imagination as the faculty enabling one to conceive of the other's emotional states seems to conform to the Kantian idea of the "supersensible vocation"⁵³ of reason, rather than to deny it. In this sense, her claims seem to resonate with Mary Midgley, a prominent animal ethicist, who recognizes

51 Caldwell, *Imagining the Other*, 57.

52 Sam Durrant, "J. M. Coetzee, Elizabeth Costello, and the Limits of the Sympathetic Imagination," in Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, 129.

53 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (1790; Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 158.

the significance of human imagination:

Imagination and conceptual thought intensify all the conflicts by multiplying the options, by letting us form all manner of incompatible schemes and allowing us to know what we are missing, and also by greatly increasing our powers of self-deception. As against that, they can give us self-knowledge, which is our strongest card in the attempt to sort conflicts out. It is to deepen that self-knowledge that I want to use comparison with other species.⁵⁴

Coetzee appears to espouse Midgley's acknowledgement of both imagination and reason; he cites her in the notes in *The Lives of Animals* and, despite Costello's opposition to rationalistic discourse, most of his ideas are philosophical or quasi-philosophical claims, frequently discussed by ethicists. Accordingly, imagination should be viewed as a supplement to reason in Coetzee's work, not its negation.

It can be claimed that Coetzee presents Costello's views as exaggerated and occasionally misguided in order to convey meanings that could otherwise not be pronounced for fear of controversy. One such view is the juxtaposition of the passivity of those who witnessed the Holocaust with people's ignorance of the source of their food, an ignorance allowing for the industrialized slaughter of animals without concern for their pain and suffering. David Attwell, a University of York scholar, identifies Costello with the figure of a wise fool, and then he argues that such a comparison "enables things to be said that could not easily be articulated by a public intellectual in the real world; nevertheless her voice *lingers* as a mark of ethical accountability."⁵⁵ That Costello pronounces views which might otherwise be considered inappropriate is confirmed by Rosemary Jolly in the following excerpt: "[t]aking up the challenge of imagining the other, and the ethical demands attendant upon this act, requires us to be vulnerable to Elizabeth Costello's insight: what we want to say about human society remains outside the realm of

⁵⁴ Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 2002), 272.

⁵⁵ David Attwell, "The Life and Times of Elizabeth Costello: J. M. Coetzee and the Public Sphere," in Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, 36 (emphasis original).

the sayable.”⁵⁶ Jolly's idea is supported by Laura Wright, a Western California University scholar, who refers to Costello's speech as Coetzee's own “rant and a sentimental voice presented through a rational argument.”⁵⁷ Richard Alan Northover relates Coetzee's use of Costello's emotional excess to the Bakhtinian idea of a bewildered fool and the Socratic self-praise of being knowledgeable about one's own lack of knowledge.⁵⁸

When Costello speaks of “thinking our way into the life of a bat,”⁵⁹ she does not mean scientifically to recreate the bat's psychic states. She does not urge that we research the other or make it an object of a philosophical analysis. She claims that “[s]ympathy has everything to do with the subject and little to do with the object,”⁶⁰ therefore, the focus of the sympathetic imagination is on the imaginer. To better understand Costello's idea, it is important to define the difference between sympathy and empathy. According to the 2011 study “Introducing a Pedagogy of Empathic Action as Informed by Social Entrepreneurs” by Anita Theresa Nowak, a McGill University scholar, empathy implies an innate capacity to inhabit the perspective of another; it is a spontaneous reaction triggered by witnessing the emotional states of people, fictional characters, and also animals. Importantly, empathy does not necessarily induce any charitable action, reciprocity or a moral transformation. Empathy should then be perceived in terms of one's moral potential which, however, does not need to be activated. A notable example of such an attitude in Coetzee's prose is David Lurie; especially at the beginning of *Disgrace*, he empathizes with the women he abuses, he is aware of their harm, but the awareness does not make him stop his immoralities.⁶¹

56 Rosemary Jane Jolly, “Going to the Dogs: Humanity in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, *The Lives of Animals*, and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” in Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, 166.

57 Laura Wright, “A Feminist-Vegetarian Defense of Elizabeth Costello: A Rant from an Ethical Academic on J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*,” in Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, 196.

58 Northover, “J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights,” 98.

59 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 33.

60 *Ibid.*, 34-35.

61 Anita Theresa Nowak, “Introducing a Pedagogy of Empathic Action as Informed by Social Entrepreneurs” (PhD diss., McGill University, 2011), 16, http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1491047424073~16.

Unlike empathy, sympathy asserts a feeling of compassion for the other from an outside position; it involves a conscious and benevolent interest in the other, not merely as an awareness of their emotional states, but predominantly an attentive care for their well-being. Sympathy is based on the ability to empathize, but it can also prompt and, in a longer perspective, refine one's empathetic capacities, both to people and animals. The role of the sympathetic imagination is thus to induce and perpetuate one's empathetic engagement with the other.

Drawing upon Nowak's study, one is reminded of Adam Smith's claim that everyone has a capacity for sympathy, although not always fully actualized. Costello conforms to this claim by identifying the potential with the human heart, which can be understood as a euphemism for people's emotional inner life, or as a placeholder for their moral principles, ethical outlook and virtues. Accordingly, faced with skeptical listeners, she prompts their sympathy for animals by appealing to their innate empathy, or as she says, by encouraging them to "open [their] heart and listen to what [their] heart says."⁶² She would not voice the encouragement if it did not stand any chance of being realized. The task of literature is, in Coetzee's view, to activate and foster the potential of sympathy latent in the human heart.

According to Heister, Costello's praise for poetry is based on the following assumption:

The author's *sympathetic imagination* becomes manifest in the mode of representation, including modalities of narrative structure and perspective, and these in turn can trigger the reader's own sympathetic imagination. Such a sympathetic engagement of the imagination within the complexity of a novel can further the reader's capacity for empathy.⁶³

In Costello's view, poets and artists are more skilled at imagining than most philosophers and scientists. Due to the skill, they accurately recreate the other's experience without

⁶² Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 37.

⁶³ Heister, "Mirror Neurons and Literature," 22 (emphasis original).

factually becoming the other, thus engaging with them sympathetically. It can be claimed that they transcend otherwise impassable boundaries, including the boundaries of fiction, gender, species, and death. Costello attributes her knowledge of what it is like to be a corpse without actually dying to her being a writer; for her, it is enough to imagine herself as a corpse to understand what death is. In the rationalistic modes of knowing based on research, logic and empirical data, it would not be possible to reach such an insight. It can hence be argued that imagination enables a knowledge that is unattainable through science and rational disquisition, yet available through a sympathetic engagement with fictional characters.

By rendering the sympathetic imagination as a cognitive faculty, Coetzee conforms to the wider conception of rationality, and at the same time he questions Thomas Nagel's argument against the accessibility of other minds. If Nagel was right, people could access only their own thoughts, which would incapacitate interpersonal communication, art and cooperation. However, despite Nagel's skepticism, art is possible, people do communicate with each other, and they are frequently capable of cooperation. It is because people can make viable claims about others not by literally accessing each other's minds but by imagining such an access. In contrast to Coetzee, then, Nagel seems to conform to the narrow conception of rationality according to which only rationalistic arguments yield valid knowledge.⁶⁴

Consequently, there is no need to "experience bat-life through the sense-sensibilities of a bat"⁶⁵; it suffices to approach it through the faculties people already have, that is, reason and imagination, and rely on what is common to bats and people. Costello claims that the common denominator for people and bats, as for any other animals, is body. In her view, people can imagine animal modes of being because, like animals, humans are bodily

64 Crary, "J. M. Coetzee, Moral Thinker," 251.

65 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 33.

beings. She emphasizes that poetry is best suited for evoking the bodily experience of animals because of its capacity to stimulate the sympathetic imagination. She refers to the animal poetry of Ted Hughes to provide a link between the sympathetic imagination and the embodied existence of non-human others. She praises Hughes for his ability to avoid the speciesism of *l'animot* by concentrating on his own engagement with the described animal, not on recreating the animal's own state of mind:

With Hughes it is a matter – I emphasize – not of inhabiting another mind but of inhabiting another body. That is the kind of poetry I bring to your attention today: poetry that does not try to find an idea in the animal, that is not about the animal, but is instead the record of an engagement with him.⁶⁶

In his two jaguar poems analyzed by Costello, Hughes avoids misrepresenting the animal he refers to because he engages with it in a sympathetic way, that is, from an outside position of fascination, limited solely to the shared feeling of embodiment. Such a limitation to what is shared by Hughes and the jaguar minimizes the danger of evoking an anthropomorphic vision of jaguariness:

In these poems we know the jaguar not from the way he seems but from the way he moves. The body is as the body moves, or as the currents of life move within it. The poems ask us to imagine our way into that way of moving, to inhabit that body.⁶⁷

The sympathetic imagination refines the empathetic faculty by appealing to the fundamental similarity between humans and other beings, that is, the experience of embodiment. Sanford Budick, a Stanford University scholar, confirms that the connection of the sympathetic imagination with the notion of embodiedness “should enable one all the more to enter into the existence of non-human being.”⁶⁸ In Heister's words, the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Sanford Budick, “Cross-culture, Chiasmus, and the Manifold of Mind,” in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 243.

“congruence of physical being [...] forms the basis for a process of identification with the other that allows the sympathetic imagination to engage with it fully.”⁶⁹ Poetry draws upon this potential of congruence in order to render the sympathetic imagination effective in advancing empathy.

The counterargument might be that people and animals experience their embodiment differently, hence there can be no ground for mutual understanding. Costello forecloses the claim by arguing that people and animals experience embodiment as joy:

To be a living bat is to be full of being; being fully a bat is like being fully human, which is also to be full of being. Bat-being in the first case, human-being in the second, maybe; but those are secondary considerations. To be full of being is to live as a body-soul. One name for the experience of full being is joy.⁷⁰

The types of joy may vary among species and even between individual beings but the general idea of joy is the same for all creatures. Costello might be accused of treating animals in the way that Derrida criticized when discussing *l'animot*, that is, as a generic category ignorant of the differences between individual animals. However, it must be remembered that Costello speaks only of an insight into a bat's perspective, not bats as a species or generally animals. Her emphasis on one bat shows that Coetzee is aware of *l'animot*, therefore, he avoids its implications when presenting his claims on animal ethics.

In her analysis of *The Lives of Animals*, Cora Diamond stresses Costello's principle of approaching animals as individual beings. She argues that such an approach involves renouncing the speciesist bias designating reason as the basis for assigning moral value. Instead, humans should recognize body as such a ground, thus relinquishing their position of dominance over animals. Without the relinquishment, argues Diamond, there is no ground for genuine understanding, as understanding is possible only if people recognize the ethical value of embodiment individually, that is, if they adopt it as a maxim of their

⁶⁹ Heister, “The Sympathetic Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee,” 101.

⁷⁰ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 33.

conduct. Diamond confirms Coetzee's argument that the success of imaginative insight depends on the individual subject. It must be remembered, however, that no-one should be forced to the recognition; on the contrary, it should derive from a free and personal choice. It follows that there is no obligation for sympathy and thus, as Costello observes at the end of her first speech, "there is no punishment"⁷¹ for failing to sympathize. She claims that moral behavior is a question of good and free will, thereby complying with the Kantian Formula of Freedom, according to which personal freedom is the preliminary and also necessary condition of morality. Moreover, by stressing the role of individual choice, Costello subscribes to the paradigm of weak anthropocentrism, mediated by Dale Jamieson, Brian G. Norton, and Eugene Hargrove, according to which moral value is decided by people. Therefore, it can be argued that, by restricting animal ethics to human good will, Coetzee renders it compliant not only with Kantian ethics, but he also assigns it to weak anthropocentrism.⁷²

Another reference to Kant can be identified in Costello's argument for reciprocity. Although there is no punishment for failing to sympathize with the other, Costello claims that sympathy is still expected, mainly because it increases one's own morality. The expectation echoes the Kantian claim that people have a duty to improve their morality.⁷³ According to Costello, the sympathetic imagination helps us meet that expectation by engendering reciprocity. Costello refers to Kant's rule of reciprocity from the second *Critique*, according to which an insight into the other's perspective prompts a morally appropriate attitude.⁷⁴ As an illustration, Costello discusses the Nazis. She claims that the Nazis failed to reciprocate with their victims because of limited sympathetic imagination; the limitation appeared when they "refused to think themselves into the place of their

71 Ibid., 35.

72 Diamond, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," 46-56.

73 Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (1797; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 191.

74 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, tr. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, ed. Jim Manis (1788; Hazleton: Pennsylvania State University Electronic Classic Series, 2010-213), 68-69.

victims,”⁷⁵ showing no remorse for the harm they caused. Consequently, argues Costello, “Germans of a particular generation are still regarded as a little outside of humanity. They lost their humanity, in our eyes, because of a certain willed ignorance on their part.”⁷⁶ As already argued in Chapter IV, she brings a similar charge against the passive witnesses of the Holocaust, among them “the people who lived in the countryside of Treblinka [and who] said that they did not know what was going on in the camps.”⁷⁷ Accordingly, in Costello’s view, willed ignorance derives from a lack of sympathy, thus it is a moral vice, inconsistent with Kant’s rule of reciprocity.⁷⁸

For Costello, the morality of the Nazis and the passive witnesses of the Holocaust is doubtful because they failed in sympathetic imagination. They did not fail in reason; on the contrary, it can be claimed that their behavior was in numerous cases an effect of a rational assessment of the situation. They ignored the atrocities in order not to draw the Nazis’ attention to themselves, thus protecting their own lives. However, although their ignorance may at times be excused as a survival mechanism, Costello nonetheless deems it to be destructive to morality. She also maintains that it undermined their humanity. As already argued, her claim parallels Kant’s view of ethics, according to which morality does not derive from practical imperatives but from categorical ones, that is, principles that can always be willed as universally binding. Coetzee relates sympathetic imagination not only to one’s morality but also to one’s humanity, confirming the Kantian understanding of ethics.

Costello claims that a similar ignorance is observable with regard to the slaughter of animals. During her speech, she recalls walking around the town where she is hosted and not seeing any slaughterhouses. She argues that such facilities are put out of human sight

⁷⁵ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 34.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁷⁸ Aaltola, “Coetzee and Alternative Animal Ethics,” 123.

to obscure their existence and to spare people the distress and moral discomfort of seeing them. The concealment can be understood as a defense mechanism. Yet Costello perceives it as an instance of willed ignorance; as she claims, slaughterhouses are “all around us as I speak, only we do not, in a certain sense, know about them.”⁷⁹ There is little difference, in Costello’s view, between ignorance of the Holocaust and ignorance of animal slaughter; they both testify to people’s limited ability to sympathize with those who suffer out of their sight. The type of ignorance discussed in *The Lives of Animals* not only evinces a failure of the sympathetic imagination, but it also violates the Kantian idea of reciprocity and the associated duty to enhance one’s morality through care and virtue.

Aaltola refers to Coetzee’s animal ethics in the following manner: since “the killing of animals destroys human souls, [by] insisting that the animal be brought forward, Coetzee is literally saving our humanity.”⁸⁰ While the above claim may seem exaggerated, Coetzee stresses that reason does not suffice to meet the Kantian task of moral enhancement without recourse to the sympathetic imagination. Although his paralogical treatment of imagination exceeds the scope of the Kantian structure of reason, Coetzee can still be considered a Kantian because, like Kant, he identifies morality as the basis of humanity, and he points out that humane treatment of animals is required for enhancing one’s own humanity. Going beyond Kant, however, Coetzee designates sympathy and imagination as cognitive faculties, thus supplementing reason in its pursuit of morality.

5.3. Development of the Sympathetic imagination in Coetzee's Work

Coetzee conceptualizes the idea of the sympathetic imagination in *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello*. Kate McInturff, a researcher at the Canadian Centre for Policy

⁷⁹ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 21.

⁸⁰ Aaltola, “Coetzee and Alternative Animal Ethics,” 127.

Alternatives, perceives the protagonist of these novels, Elizabeth Costello, as a mouthpiece allowing Coetzee a wider communication of an “ethical imperative to sympathise with the embodied experiences of other beings,”⁸¹ whether human or animal. In *Disgrace* he presents the possibilities of the sympathetic imagination, whereas in *Slow Man*, its limitations. Heister argues that the notion of the sympathetic imagination can be identified in all of Coetzee's fiction, although in different modalities, progressing from its stalled emergence in the early fictions, to its application in stimulating the reader's empathetic sensibilities, and finally to its retroactive application by Coetzee to himself in his autobiographical novels. The sympathetic imagination can thus be perceived as a major theme of Coetzee's prose.⁸²

It could be argued that *Dusklands* (1974) marks the first stage of Coetzee's preoccupation with the sympathetic imagination and its association with the bodily. The protagonists of the novella, Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee, are both presented as unsympathetic figures who fail to introspect the other's perspective. Ignoring the suffering of the weaker and less privileged, they are beneficiaries and active propagators of systems of social subjugation, prejudice, and abuse based on economic and military violence. Moreover, having a limited understanding of other people, they also struggle to comprehend their own selves. Coetzee renders their restricted self-insight by means of their convoluted self-narrations; told from the first person perspective, hence implying a degree of self-reflection, the narratives of Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee are permeated with a sense of separation and lost authority. They are self-contradictory, unstable, and they can hardly be assumed to be trustworthy, as if they were struggling to assert their own identities. Referring to the protagonists' failed attempts at self-interpretation, David James, a University of Nottingham scholar, claims as follows:

81 Kate McInturff, “Rex Oedipus: The Ethics of Sympathy in Recent Work by J. M. Coetzee,” *Postcolonial Text* 3, no. 4 (2007): 5.

82 Heister, “The Sympathetic Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee,” 10.

What sounds at first like an indulgent exercise in self-pathologization turns out to be a commentary on the need for such an exercise to be carried out in the first place. It's as though Dawn is standing at some distance from the subject of his own dissemination.⁸³

Apart from deficient empathy for others, none of the protagonists has an insight into their own selves. Interestingly, nor does the reader, which can be perceived as Coetzee's challenge to his audience's own sympathetic imagination.

In the epigraph to the "Vietnam Project," the first of the narratives, it reads that "it is difficult not to sympathize." The quote in full refers to the difficulties faced by the US armed forces in recruiting soldiers who would not suffer moral remorse at mass-killing their enemies. It could also be interpreted as Coetzee's assertion of the reader's struggle to sympathize with Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee. Admittedly, because of their reclusive personalities, connoting "pathological rationalists who attempt, without success, to redeem their solipsistic selves through horrifyingly savage acts of violence,"⁸⁴ Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee could be perceived as posing a test to the sympathetic imagination of Coetzee's readership. The challenge is demanding due to the characters' pathological detachment and episodes of gratuitous violence aimed at the weaker, among them children and native Africans. The sense of intimacy created by the first-person narration can be treated as an additional encouragement to take up the challenge. In the "Afterword" to "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee," the second narrative of the *Dusklands*, Coetzee argues that to "understand the life of this obscure farmer requires a positive act of the imagination,"⁸⁵ thereby further stimulating his audience's empathy.

According to Elizabeth Costello, the sympathetic imagination is activated by renditions of the bodily, not because of their shocking imagery, but rather because the

83 David James, "Dusklands (1974)," in *A Companion to the Works of J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Tim Mehigan (Rochester: Camden House, 2011), 44.

84 Peter McDonald, *The Literature Police* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 307.

85 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Dusklands* (1974; London: Vintage, 2004), 109.

body, being common to all living beings, can serve as a basis for identification with the other. *Dusklands* abounds with descriptions of the physical; Dawn has a pornographic fascination with photography picturing scenes of torture, whereas Jacobus Coetzee is first violated by the Nama people he encounters in the South African interior, and then he brutally kills them in a later meeting. The bodily mediated through violence and suffering seems to trigger a sympathetic response among both of them. After gazing at the prints, Dawn stretches out his hand to the people pictured in the photographs, imagining that one of them “flashes a black eye at [him].”⁸⁶ Occasionally, Eugene's sympathy extends to his own troubled self:

There is no doubt that I am a sick man. Vietnam has cost me too much. I use the metaphor of the dolorous wound. [...] Inside my body, beneath the skin and muscle and flesh that drape me, I am bleeding. [...] I imagine a wound weeping somewhere in the cavern behind my eyes.⁸⁷

Dawn applies his new sensibilities to his wife. However, his hyper-rationalism quells his developing empathy; he becomes confused about his own feelings, and losing his sense of reality, he stabs his son with a pencil. His sympathy is defeated by his overactive rationalism.

Jacobus Coetzee reveals less empathetic potential. However, having been made aware of his physical fragility during the combat with the natives, he considers taking an external perspective on himself: “[w]ith what new eyes of knowledge, I wondered, would I see myself when I saw myself, now that I had been violated by the cackling heathen. Would I know myself better?”⁸⁸ Despite a moment of self-reflection, Jacobus Coetzee becomes unsympathetic, murdering the nomads at their next meeting.

Magda from *In the Heart of the Country* resembles Eugene Dawn. She is a recluse,

⁸⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 97.

confused and incapacitated by her subjugation to the discourses of patriarchy and colonialism. Due to her unstable emotionality, most of what she relates in her story seems to be either imagined or hallucinated, so her narrative cannot be fully trusted. On the one hand, her fragmentary narrative disrupts effective insight into her feelings. On the other hand, however, the disorderly character of her speech stimulates the reader's imagination, prompting sympathy for her predicament.

What also encourages the reader's sympathetic engagement with Magda is her body language. Struggling with verbal communication, she expresses a preference for the signs of the body:

I am spoken to not in words, which come to me quaint and veiled, but in signs, in conformations of face and hands, in postures of shoulders and feet, in nuances of tune and tone, in gaps and absences whose grammar has never been recorded. Reading the brown folk I grope, as they grope reading me: for they too hear my words only dully, listening for those overtones of the voice, those subtleties of the eyebrows that tell them my true meaning: "Beware, do not cross me," "What I say does not come from me." Across valley of space and time we strain ourselves to catch the pale smoke of each other's signals.⁸⁹

Despite her relative ease at reading the body language, Magda fails to understand the meanings conveyed through the body signs of others, especially her father's: "[w]e look at each other. Try as I will, I cannot work out what feelings his [her father's] face expresses. I lack the faculty of reading faces."⁹⁰ Apparently, she has a language, be it verbal or bodily, but she seems unable to use it, not only in communication with others, but even more in conveying her own meanings. It could be claimed that to understand her, one should sympathetically imagine what she means, relying on the signs of her body.

Like Jacobus Coetzee, Magda commits an act of senseless violence. She kills her father to assuage the trauma of her subjugation to him. However, disposing of the patriarchal master figure from a strictly colonial setting leads to an escalation of violence:

⁸⁹ John Maxwell Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country* (1977; New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 7-8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

she is raped by her servant and the farm gets ransacked. The murder disqualifies her as a sympathetic imager. However, her deficiencies do pose a challenge to the reader's sympathetic imagination, as her misery can be explained as a result of her upbringing in an environment discouraging empathy and a consideration for the weaker.

One could assume that the Magistrate, the protagonist of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, has also been brought up to be an unrelenting servant of the Empire, especially in relations with its subjects and potential enemies. For a substantial part of the novel he is presented as a self-centered hedonist who, similarly to Eugene Dawn, harbors a perverse fascination with the Empire's rule of torture and intimidation, embodied by Colonel Joll and his attendant Mandel. Only after witnessing the physical torment of Joll's prisoners does he begin a moral transformation. In the first instance, the change is mediated by a sympathetic engagement with the barbarian girl, half-blinded during a hearing with Joll, and then with an entire group of captive nomads, tortured by Joll and his troops in public to make a show of his power. Coetzee proposes the suffering body as the principal stimulant for the sympathetic imagination, not necessarily because it evokes pity or compassion, but because “[t]he body in pain transgresses the linguistically and discursively inscribed difference between people by asserting an incontrovertible reality that lies beyond the cultural enclosure and its local forms of knowledge.”⁹¹ The sympathetic imagination is prompted by the exposure to the bodily because of the physical congruence of all living beings, human and non-human, and their shared experience of suffering and pain.

It is due to the Magistrate's enhanced sympathetic insight into the other and also into himself that he realizes his own complicity in the atrocities committed by Joll and his attendant. The Magistrate learns that he and the emissaries of the Third Bureau represent the master part in the master-servant dialectic. Their similarity is rendered in a scene in

91 Mike Marais, “*Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980),” in Mehigan, *A Companion to the Works of J. M. Coetzee*, 69.

which the Magistrate sees his image double-reflected in Joll's black spectacles. Willing to distance himself from the Colonel, the Magistrate concentrates on the body, as in the following excerpt in which he tries to get closer to the barbarian girl: "I shut my eyes, breathe deeply to still my agitation, and concentrate wholly on seeing her through my blind fingertips."⁹² Stressing his corporeal sensations, the Magistrate manages to access the barbarian girl's perspective, which in turn makes Joll more and more estranged from him.

As argued in Chapter IV, the Magistrate's sympathy for the barbarian girl might only be a pretense to save the good name of the Empire by projecting himself as its benevolent face. However, according to Mike Marais, the Magistrate is confused about his motivations; he may be fascinated with the workings of the Empire, but he seems in doubt whether he wants to participate in it. Marais argues that "the Magistrate no longer knows himself. Since they bear little relation to his assumptions, intentions, and ostensible desires, he finds his actions totally unpredictable."⁹³ In this sense, Laura Wright is mistaken to argue that the Magistrate's "inability to see what motivates his actions is a kind of blindness that results in a failure of the sympathetic imagination."⁹⁴ On the contrary, his dwindling ability to see his imperial self should rather be perceived as a symptom of the Magistrate developing sympathy for the victims of the state he represents.

A significant indication of the Magistrate's progressing sympathetic imagination in the context of the present dissertation is his encounter with a ram during one of his hunting trips:

He chews again, a single scythe of the jaws, and stops. In the clear silence of the morning I find an obscure sentiment lurking at the edge of my consciousness. With the buck before me suspended in immobility, [...] this has become no longer a morning's hunting but an occasion on which either the proud ram bleeds to death on the ice or the old hunter misses his aim [...]. Behind my paltry cover I

92 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980; London: Vintage Books, 2004), 46.

93 Marais, "Waiting for the Barbarians (1980)," 70.

94 Laura Wright, *Writing "Out of All the Camps": J. M. Coetzee's Narratives of Displacement*, ed. William E. Cain (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 80.

stand trying to shrug off this irritating and uncanny feeling, till the buck wheels and with a whisk of his tail and a brief splash of hooves disappears into the tall reeds.⁹⁵

As in the case of David Lurie from *Disgrace*, the Magistrate's sympathetic imagination first develops for animals. Apart from the ram, he contemplates the migrating birds, reflecting in particular on their experience as embodied beings. During the trip to return the barbarian girl to her people, the Magistrate kills an enfeebled pack-horse, but before he does the task of mercy, he sympathetically imagines its thoughts: "I can swear that the beast knows what is to happen. At the sight of the knife its eyes roll. With the blood spurting from its neck it scrambles free of the sand and totters a pace or two downwind before it falls."⁹⁶ As with Lurie, the experience of the bodily, intensified by the harsh conditions of the journey, eventually prompts the Magistrate to extend his sympathy from animals to people. Firstly, he sympathizes with the barbarian girl, with whom he grows intimate, and who finally seems to feel comfortable in his company. Secondly, he sympathizes with Joll's captives, whom he defends in public, thus exposing Joll's crimes. In neither case is the Magistrate's transformation complete, yet it is progress, eventually replacing Joll's terror and restoring the fort people's suppressed sympathy for each other.

According to Heister, the "sympathetic imagination requires embodiment in order to function properly; without the body there is no encounter."⁹⁷ However, an exposure to the physical does not suffice for a moral transformation to be successful; one needs at least a potential for an empathetic engagement with the other. Joll witnesses much physical suffering, experiencing the bodily in the closest possible manner, and yet he does not achieve any of his goals: he sustains a military and political defeat, nor does he "find out the truth"⁹⁸ about the barbarians and their intentions, the primary cause for his visit in the

95 Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 42-43.

96 Ibid., 67.

97 Heister, "The Sympathetic Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee," 80.

98 Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 3.

fort. His exposure to the suffering body leads to his moral corruption because, in contrast to the Magistrate, he seems incapable of empathy. The notion of an empathetic potential, prompted by the sympathetic imagination and an exposure to the bodily, is a recurring theme of Coetzee's prose.

The titular protagonist of *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) is initially presented as an unsympathetic individual. Despite his care for his mother, he seems little interested in people's feelings, he is indifferent to interpersonal relations, and he deliberately avoids contact with others. He appears to have shifted his sense of agency to his mother, whom he slavishly obeys, without ever opposing her decisions, even after her death. The other authority he obeys is the list of twenty-one rules which he learned by heart during his stay in Huis Norenius, the children's home in which he spent most of his youth. He refers to the list as his "father."⁹⁹ His actions seem to lack any personal involvement. He is apathetic, disengaged, and indifferent to the outside world. He clearly lacks understanding of what he is doing. His apathy shows in its starkest form after his mother's death. He is disturbed by the event, yet not because of the loss of a beloved mother, but rather because there is nobody to instruct him any more. Having received her ashes, he is confused, and clueless what to do next, he resumes the journey initiated on his mother's demand.

Similarly to the Magistrate's expedition to barbarian territory, Michael K's journey can be perceived as a representation of his progressing engagement with the physical, the landscape being its most immediate incarnation. The scenery in which Michael K moves about is in Attwell's words "completely mapped, fenced, and policed,"¹⁰⁰ so it is instrumentalized along the logic of utilitarian rationalism. Anton Leist defines K's settings in the following excerpt:

99 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983; London: Vintage, 2004), 104.

100 David Attwell, "Coetzee's Estrangements," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 41, no. 2/3 (2008): 233.

There are, in essence, two worlds coming into view: our everyday world of separation and time, words and power, and instrumental ends and means, and an alternative world, however vague, of amalgamation and presence, bodies and trance, self-forgetfulness and nondirected joy.¹⁰¹

Michael K accesses the “alternative world” by wandering out of urban areas, which are the results of instrumental rationalism, and entering the peacefulness of inanimate and paralogical nature. Leist views the new scenery as the setting for the development of K's sympathetic imagination.

Having abandoned the urbanized landscape, Michael K grows attached to the natural surroundings, physically likening himself to an animal. He sleeps wherever he finds it comfortable. He hunts with his bare hands or using primitive tools. He scavenges for food, and he inhabits caves where he spends time dozing off in a state of lethargy. As he lives in darkness, his sight deteriorates, whereas his sense of smell becomes more acute. He frequently compares himself to worms, lizards, birds, and other animals usually considered to be insignificant or even vermin. He drinks from a creek on all fours. As he claims, he is “living off the land.”¹⁰² It could be argued that he himself becomes the land as he almost literally merges into the earth while some children are playing:

He lay so still that the smaller children, having first kept their distance, next tried to rouse him, and, when he would not be roused, incorporated his body into their game. They clambered over him and fell upon him as if he were part of the earth. Still hiding his face, he rolled over and found that he could doze even with little bodies riding on his back. He found unexpected pleasure in these games. It felt to him that he was drawing health from the children's touch [...]¹⁰³

Michael K's progression toward an inanimate object of nature is detectable in his body; he becomes less and less sensible to hunger and pain; he has neither sexual drive nor any other bodily desires. His thinking slows down, until he becomes entirely numb.

101 Anton Leist, “Against Society, Against History, Against Reason: Coetzee's Archaic Postmodernism,” in Leist and Singer, *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics*, 218.

102 Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K*, 46.

103 Ibid., 84.

As illustrated in the above quote, immersion into the environment is the source of happiness for Michael K. He also feels “a deep joy in his physical being”¹⁰⁴ when nature enters his body, for instance in the form of the food he himself grows: “he chewed [his roasted pumpkin] with tears of joy in his eyes.”¹⁰⁵ Having established an emotional attachment to his little garden, he is reluctant to leave it, even when it becomes clear that he may die of hunger by living only off his produce. Referring to *The Lives of Animals*, it can be argued that Michael K's elated feelings conform to Elizabeth Costello's claim that “the flow of joy comes from [...] being an embodied being,”¹⁰⁶ or from “the experience of full being.”¹⁰⁷ In Costello's view, such an experience evinces one's sympathetic imagination.

Michael K sympathizes with plants, animals, and he even cultivates the earth: “[t]here was a cord of tenderness that stretched from him to the patch of earth beside the dam and must be cut. It seemed to him that one could cut a cord like that only so many times before it would not grow again.”¹⁰⁸ He refers to his pumpkins as if they were his children. Initially, he approaches animals without any sentimentality, killing them in a savage and brutal way, yet due to his evolving sympathetic imagination, he soon feels disgusted by the killings, as in the case of the ewe he has drowned in mud:

He found it hard to believe that he had spent a day chasing after [the ewe] like a madman with a knife. He had a vision of himself riding the ewe to death under the mud by the light of the moon, and shuddered. He would have liked to bury the ewe somewhere and forget the episode; or else, best of all, to slap the creature on its haunch and see it scramble to its feet and trot off.¹⁰⁹

Michael K also develops sympathetic imagination for people. He sympathizes with the

104 Ibid., 102.

105 Ibid., 113.

106 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 34.

107 Ibid., 33.

108 Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K*, 65-66.

109 Ibid., 55.

mother whose child has died in her arms; he protects a group of children threatened by a raid on the internment camp in which they are detained; during the same raid, he helps a wounded soldier. He also inspires the medical officer of the camp to abandon his patronizing attitude toward the detainees and sympathize with them. The culmination of the medical officer's sympathy occurs when he imagines the perspective of Michael K in order to understand his passive resistance:

Then as I watched you day after day I slowly began to understand the truth: that you were crying secretly, unknown to your conscious self (forgive the term), for a different kind of food, food that no camp can supply. [...] Now I had been taught that the body contains no ambivalence. The body, I had been taught, wants only to live.¹¹⁰

Continuing his sympathetic insight, the medical officer acknowledges Michael K's right to live as he wishes, thus asserting his autonomy. From a bureaucrat wishing to subject Michael K to the camp discipline, the medical officer turns into a sympathetic imaginer, eventually visualizing himself saying to Michael K: "only you know the way."¹¹¹

It can be argued that Michael K influences the readers in a similar way as he does the medical officer, that is, by being a silent enigma which stimulates the imagination only of those who are willing to learn from him, without imposing their own meanings. It seems that the silence of the animals in Coetzee's fiction, especially Lurie's silencing of Driepoot in *Disgrace*, has a similar function: it is to prompt the reader's sympathetic imagination of the other, whether human or non-human.¹¹²

The theme of silence predominates Coetzee's 1986 novel *Foe*. Although it is at times difficult to know for certain, the novel is narrated by Susan Barton, a castaway who employs her sympathetic imagination to learn about the life story of Friday, a tongueless African whom she encounters on a solitary island inhabited by Crusoe, Coetzee's imaginary

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 163-164.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 166.

¹¹² Cf. Heister, "The Sympathetic Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee," 109-116

prototype of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. Despite her attempts, Barton fails to learn Friday's story, which she ascribes to his speechlessness: "many stories can be told of Friday's tongue, but the true story is buried within Friday, who is mute."¹¹³ In *Doubling the Point* (1992), Coetzee argues that "Friday is mute, but Friday does not disappear, because Friday is body."¹¹⁴ The claim reflects Coetzee's preoccupation with embodiment as the principal purpose of his literary work:

If I look back over my own fiction, I see a simple (simple-minded?) standard erected. That standard is the body. Whatever else, the body is not "that which is not," and the proof that it *is* is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt. (One can get away with such crudeness in fiction; one can't in philosophy, I'm sure.) Not grace, then, but at least the body.¹¹⁵

As already argued, Coetzee maintains that a recourse to the physical in literature assists the sympathetic imagination, enhancing thereby one's understanding of the other.

Despite Coetzee's stress on the bodily, Susan Barton trivializes Friday's physical presence; she perceives him as a shadow: "Friday is no more in subjection than my shadow is for following me around."¹¹⁶ His ghostly existence is referred to at their first meeting. The scene is laid at a shore, Barton looks up at Friday and in the first instance sees "a man with a dazzling halo about him."¹¹⁷ When Susan pays a visit to Foe, she announces herself by saying: "I am alone, with Friday,"¹¹⁸ treating her companion more like a theoretical than real bodily being.

The disembodiment of Friday incapacitates Barton's sympathetic engagement with him. Upon their first encounter on the beach, she thinks of Friday in racist terms, misrepresenting him as a cannibal wishing to harm her. Typically for Coetzee's view of

¹¹³ John Maxwell Coetzee, *Foe* (1986; New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 118.

¹¹⁴ John Maxwell Coetzee, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 248.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. (emphasis original).

¹¹⁶ Coetzee, *Foe*, 150.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 113.

embodied feelings, her prejudice is replaced by sympathy when they come into close physical contact. When Susan gets hurt, Friday offers to carry her. Reluctantly, she accepts the offer and “part-way skipping on one leg, part-way riding on his back, with [her] petticoat gathered up and [her] chin brushing his springy hair, [she] ascend[s] the hillside, [her] fear of him abating in this strange backward embrace.”¹¹⁹ The other physical congruence between Barton and Friday reminds one of Costello's notion of joy; on their way back to England, she begins to imitate his dance, which soon leads her to experience strong ecstatic feelings. During the activity, she realizes that “there [are] other lives open to [her] than this one,” which is the closest that she gets to imagining another perspective in the whole novel.

After they arrive in England, the bodily identification between Barton and Friday diminishes, until it is eventually destroyed by Barton's attempt to fit Friday into Western categories. While they are still on the island, she tries to teach him other tunes than the one he constantly plays on his flute. In England, she instructs him how to write in English. There is also an insinuation that she would like to seduce him, thus involving him in the Western paradigm of sexual domination. Her efforts to subjugate Friday remind us of the medical officer's desire to impose a camp designation on Michael K.

Barton's failure “to build a bridge of words”¹²⁰ with Friday is indicative of her deficient ability to sympathize with the other, discernible in her refusal to present him as an substantial being:

What is the truth of Friday? You will respond: he is neither cannibal nor laundryman, these are mere names, they do not touch his essence, he is a substantial body, he is himself, Friday is Friday. But that is not so. No matter what he is to himself (is he anything to himself?), what he is to the world is what I make of him.¹²¹

119 Ibid., 6.

120 Ibid., 60.

121 Ibid., 121.

On the one hand, Barton's failed sympathetic imagination can be attributed to her own disembodied vision of Friday. On the other hand, however, it can be attributed to Friday's muteness. Mike Marais perceives Friday's silence as a form of resistance against the Western paradigm of dominance through subjugation to language, culture, and representation:

In his representations of the silent other, Coetzee invests silence with power: silence is cast as the means by which the other preserves its alterior status against assimilation by the West. [...] Silence is neither a sign of submission nor merely a strategy of passive resistance, but a counter-strategy through which the other preserves, even asserts, its alterior status and in so doing interrogates the fixity of dominant power structures and positions.¹²²

Commenting on the above quote, Heister claims that the failure of Barton's sympathetic imagination is caused by her persisting with Friday's alterity, thus with their dissimilarity.¹²³

The other reason for Susan Barton's failed sympathetic imagination is her Westernized embodiment of Friday; in her narrative, she presents him as either a ghost, or a shadow, or an angel, or a cannibal, or an animal, but never as himself. A genuine representation of Friday would require her to admit that there is a limit to the logocentric worldview of Western rationalism, a gesture she is unwilling to make, mainly for fear of undermining her own dominant position. Coetzee's wider notion of rationality designates a recognition of the limit as an element of reason's pursuit of validity. Accordingly, at the closing of *Foe*, the narrator, now identifiable with Coetzee himself, rather than with Barton,¹²⁴ enters "a place where bodies are their own signs,"¹²⁵ that is, a paralogical space in which words are replaced with the unintelligible sounds of the body, among them sighs, murmurs, and a

122 Mike Marais, "The Hermeneutics of Empire: Coetzee's Post-colonial Metafiction," in *Critical Perspectives on J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 74-75.

123 Heister, "The Sympathetic Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee," 134.

124 See Dominic Head, *J. M. Coetzee* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 123.

125 Coetzee, *Foe*, 157.

roar. These sounds may be meaningless within the Western rationalistic paradigm, but they nevertheless stimulate the reader's sympathetic imagination. The wider conception of rationality as presented by Coetzee entails a sympathetic openness to the unintelligible but physically substantial autonomy of the other.

According to Coetzee, the central role of embodiment in literature is to activate the reader's sympathetic imagination, and in a further perspective, to improve his/her empathetic sensitivities. In *Foe*, he warns against literature that does the opposite, i.e., a type of writing which disembodies the other by presenting the narrating self's thought paradigm as the only normative frame of understanding. Rosemary Jolly argues that such a literary disembodiment is caused by the authorial insistence on controlling the narrated other. Derrida's notion of *l'animot* evokes the disembodiment of the animals as conceptualized through generic, de-individualizing language. As Jolly maintains, writing – and also reading – can be perceived as a form of cannibalism, nullifying characters as autonomic, bodily, and real beings:

The metaphor used to convey this violation of the body by narrative in *Foe* is that of cannibalism. The only cannibals in *Foe* are its narrator-characters, and the only cannibalism is that which they inflict upon their subjects in the process of turning them into stories. Foe, in the process of trying to turn Susan Barton into a story, is depicted actually biting her, then sucking the wound and murmuring [...].¹²⁶

The positive use of literature, that is, as a tool for engraving the sympathetic imagination by physically approximating the other, is the theme of Coetzee's following novel.

Age of Iron (1990) has the form of a letter written by Elizabeth Curren, a terminally ill professor of classical literature, to her emigrant daughter. As argued in Chapter IV, Curren may be staging a self-justifying melodrama to dissimulate her tainted racism, or to quell her remorse at benefiting from a system based on the abuse of the less privileged. Her

¹²⁶ Rosemary Jane Jolly, *Colonization, Violence, and Narration in White South African Writing: André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, and J. M. Coetzee* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996). 7-8.

perverse intentions can be identified in the scene in which she refuses the offer of Vercueil, her homeless caretaker, to help her realize her declarations of immolating herself in protest against the apartheid. In the following scenes, she is scolded by Vercueil, who then abandons her in a parking lot. Left alone, she raves in anger. Having calmed down, she observes a woman in a nearby car, and imagines herself through the woman's eyes: [t]hat woman in the car: perhaps, as they drove off, she was saying to her companion: 'What a sour old creature! What a closed-off face!'"¹²⁷ Through his violent reaction, Vercueil has stimulated Curren's imagination to see beyond herself and to access the perspective of the other.

Although Elizabeth Curren perceives Vercueil as an angel, sent to accompany her on her passage from life to death, it can be argued that his role is to activate her sympathetic imagination by becoming more and more intimate with her. Initially, she detests Vercueil, repelled by his beggar appearance, poor hygiene, especially his smell, and his lack of decorum. However, her disgust soon develops into "a flicker of embarrassment,"¹²⁸ as in the scene when she finds him sleeping on the kitchen floor. Her embarrassment can be perceived as a sign of her developing ability to take an external perspective on her own behavior, not only that of her ill-mannered companion. Her insight grows when she spots Vercueil eavesdropping on her playing Bach:

I was playing for myself. But at some point a board creaked or a shadow passed across the curtain and I knew he was outside listening. [...] So I played Bach for him, as well as I could. [...] Has it made its way into the heart too of the man in the sagging trousers eavesdropping at the window? Have our two hearts, our organs of love, been tied for this brief while by a cord of sound?¹²⁹

Gradually, her dislike changes into acceptance, then she becomes intimate with Vercueil.

Their intimacy is evinced by their increasing physical closeness: Vercueil allows Curren to

¹²⁷ John Maxwell Coetzee, *Age of Iron* (1990; New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 127-128.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

touch his sore fingers, he carries her home when she collapses during the skirmish in Gugulethu, and she, in turn, learns to tolerate his poor hygiene. As Heister argues, Vercueil provides “the impulse for Elizabeth Curren to cultivate her sympathetic imagination,”¹³⁰ the impulse being his otherness, and his imposing bodily presence. She soon grows aware of his sympathy for her: “in the look he gives me I see myself.”¹³¹ The culmination of Curren's moral transformation is when she invites Vercueil to lie with her in bed. There is also Vercueil's dog that joins them. Interestingly, with the dog between their lying bodies, the scene foreshadows *Disgrace* and the idea that animals can facilitate one's moral transformation.

Curren undergoes a similar process of sympathetic sensitization in relation to her servant's son, Bheki, and his friend, John, whom she initially approaches with a sense of superiority. As with Vercueil, her moral transformation is prompted by her exposure to the boys' bodies. Unlike Vercueil, however, these are dead bodies:

I was shaking: shivers ran up and down my body, my hands trembled. I thought of the boy's open eyes. I thought: What did he see as his last sight on earth? I thought: This is the worst thing I have witnessed in my life. And I thought: Now my eyes are open and I can never close them again.¹³²

She imagines herself in the position of the dead other, like Lurie, who imaginatively sympathizes with the dogs he incinerates. In a sense, she could perversely be sympathizing with herself, but it seems unlikely, judging by her later refusal to give up John, a young Gugulethu rioter whom she hides in her house, to the police.

Despite Curren's attempts, John is shot. By changing her perspective to the third person view, Coetzee points to the role of embodiment in stimulating her sympathetic imagination:

¹³⁰ Heister, “The Sympathetic Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee,” 157.

¹³¹ Coetzee, *Age of Iron*, 24.

¹³² Ibid., 102-103.

His eyes are unblinking, fixed on the door through which he is going to leave the world. His mouth is dry but he is not afraid. His heart beats steadily like a fist in his chest clenching and unclenching. His eyes are open and mine, though I write, are shut. My eyes are shut in order to see.¹³³

Curren's shut eyes indicate the activity of her sympathetic imagination.¹³⁴

It is Curren's experience of the other's bodily presence that prompts the development of her sympathetic imagination. Accordingly, a lack of physical contact with her daughter leads to their mutual alienation: "the letter [to her daughter] seems to grow more abstract, more abstracted, the kind of letter one writes from the stars, from the farther void, disembodied, crystalline, bloodless."¹³⁵ As Heister claims, "while the empathetic approximation to Vercueil progresses, the empathetic distance to her [Curren's] daughter increases."¹³⁶ Curren hopes that her letter will assuage the estrangement between her and her daughter. However, since it is uncertain whether the letter ever reaches the daughter, it seems that the primary function of Curren's witting is to confirm the potential of literature for triggering the sympathetic imagination: "[i]f Vercueil does not send these writings on, you will never read them. You will never even know they existed. A certain body of truth will never take on flesh: my truth: how I lived in these times, in this place."¹³⁷ This quote also evokes Coetzee's emphasis on literary embodiment as a prerequisite for the development of the sympathetic imagination.

Elizabeth Curren's moral transformation is completed at the end of the novel when she grants precedence to bodily present Vercueil over her absent daughter. Anticipating the pro-animal overtone of *Disgrace*, she claims that "one must love what is nearest, as a dog loves."¹³⁸ However, it is at the beginning of *Age of Iron* that Coetzee expresses one of his

133 Ibid., 175.

134 Cf. Samantha Vice, "Truth and Love Together at Last," in Leist and Singer, "J. M. Coetzee and Ethics," 308.

135 Coetzee, *Age of Iron*, 137.

136 Heister, "The Sympathetic Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee," 160.

137 Coetzee, *Age of Iron*, 130.

138 Ibid., 190.

most potent claims, that is, the idea that literary embodiment can at times mediate a real-life contact with the other:

Man, house, dog: no matter what the word, through it I stretch out a hand to you. In another world I would not need words. I would appear on your doorstep. "I have come for a visit," I would say, and that would be the end of words: I would embrace you and be embraced. But in this world, in this time, I must reach out to you in words.¹³⁹

Due to its potential of embodied representation, literature can stimulate one's imagination to sympathize with the narrated other as if they were real, physical, bodily beings, thus improving one's own moral character. The idea of art as a stimulus for moral improvement echoes Kant's views on the relation between ethics and aesthetics from his third *Critique*.

The idea of embodiment is the central theme of Coetzee's 1994 novel, *The Master of Petersburg*, in which the fictional Dostoevsky recreates the last days of his stepson, Pavel, and the circumstances of his sudden death. As noted in Chapter IV, Dostoevsky achieves the goal by interviewing the people who knew Pavel before his demise. Dostoevsky imitates his stepson's everyday behavior; he hires his room, wears his clothes, visits the places he might have been to, and reads his notes. He strives to recreate the physical presence of Pavel by searching his smell: "[f]aintly the smell of his son comes to him. He breathes in deeply, again and again, thinking: his ghost, entering me."¹⁴⁰ He also craves the bodies of the women Pavel had close relations with, among them Matryona and Anna Sergeyevna. His methods recall the Magistrate's search for Joll's meaning in the barbarian girl's wounded body. Like the Magistrate from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Dostoevsky cannot recreate Pavel's life and death by conducting a mere detective-like enquiry; instead, he needs to go beyond reason, and "paradox within paradox, darkness swaddled in darkness – he must answer to what he does not expect,"¹⁴¹ which ultimately results in

¹³⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴⁰ John Maxwell Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg*, (1994; New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 3-4.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 80.

Dostoevsky's compromising his ideals, betraying the memory of Pavel and using his stepson's tragic death as the stimulus for his new novel. Dostoevsky's imaginative insight into Pavel is thus hardly sympathetic; rather, it is perverse, if not entirely narcissistic.

The perverted sense of Dostoevsky's imagination is visible in how he explains Pavel's death to Matryona. He tells her of a cruel God who callously condemns Pavel to death, thus scaring her and traumatizing her by making her realize her own mortality. Wanting to comfort her, he takes her into his arms. However, holding her close to his body, "[h]e thinks of a little terracotta statue he saw in the ethnographic museum in Berlin: the Indian god Shiva lying on his back, blue and dead, and riding on him the figure of a terrible goddess, [...] staring-eyed, ecstatic [...], drawing the divine seed out of him."¹⁴² Confirming the obscene character of his imagination, he admits that he has no difficulties imagining Matryona in the goddess's ecstasy.¹⁴³

Dostoevsky has recourse to perverse imagination in reclaiming Pavel. Although he deems the metaphorical language of literature to be "nonsense,"¹⁴⁴ he still imagines himself taking the place of his stepson: "I am the one who died and was buried, he thinks, Pavel the one who lives and will always live. What I am struggling to do now is to understand what form this is in which I have returned from the grave."¹⁴⁵ The form mentioned by Dostoevsky is literary embodiment; Pavel returns from the grave through the work of his stepfather's perverse imagination, which Coetzee equates with *Demons* (1872) by the historical Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

At the beginning of *The Master of Petersburg*, Coetzee presents Dostoevsky as suffering from writer's block; what makes him resume writing is the vision of Pavel's dead body. Accordingly, Pavel is the other that Dostoevsky tries to access, and he succeeds in it

142 Ibid., 76.

143 Sławomir Masłoń, *Père-Versions of the Truth: The Novels of J. M. Coetzee* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2007), 145.

144 Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg*, 118.

145 Ibid., 124.

only in writing. Since it is Dostoevsky's own writing, it can be claimed that he does not access his stepson but himself, an idea confirmed by Dostoevsky's frequent self-comparisons to Pavel. *The Master of Petersburg* can thus be taken as a novel of self-discovery through writing. In this regard, the novel also features Coetzee's insight into his own self embodied as Dostoevsky because, similarly to Dostoevsky who concedes to writing "perversions of the truth,"¹⁴⁶ Coetzee admits to basing his novels on his own life experience: "[o]f course I am talking about myself. Whenever we talk about something else we are talking about ourselves. [...] But I choose not to reflect on it, turn myself back to look upon it (like Orpheus). Life is too short. (The meaning of the Orpheus story: you kill your inspiration by turning back to look at it.)"¹⁴⁷

However, Coetzee does look back on himself in a series of three quasi-autobiographical novels: *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2001), and *Summertime* (2009). In *Boyhood*, Coetzee presents his fictionalized self's sense of alienation resulting from his mixed Anglo-Afrikaner descent. It is a retrospective insight into the origins of Coetzee's own sympathetic imagination, mediated through the relations with his parents, his affection for the family farm of Voëlfontein, and his emerging sympathy for animals, although marked with occasional violence to ants: "[h]e holds the pipe [of a vacuum cleaner] over a trail of ants, sucking them up to their death."¹⁴⁸ *Youth* features the author's introspection into himself as a young artist. Coetzee criticizes himself for his destabilized emotionality, instrumental treatment of women, and blind admiration for canonic literature, presenting it as a camouflage mechanism for his South African inferiority complex. In *Summertime* Coetzee delivers a multidimensional perspective over his career as a writer and as a human being. Through the characters of his former lovers, Coetzee

146 Ibid., 236.

147 Michelle Kelly, "The Master of Petersburg (1994)," in Mehigan, *A Companion to the Works of J. M. Coetzee*, 143.

148 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997; New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 2.

makes an effort to assuage the self-criticism of his former autobiographical fictions, this time sympathizing with his own self.

The three quasi-autobiographies can be perceived as conclusive in terms of Coetzee's development of the sympathetic imagination. The sense of closure is well expressed by Heister:

By applying his sympathetic imagination to his former selves, he applies what has been exercised in all his previous fictions and achieves an empathetic engagement through the fictionalized self-reflection. For the reader, Coetzee's acting out and working through complements the lessons on the sympathetic imagination received in reading his previous novels; while these taught the reader how to direct his sympathetic imagination towards others in a mode of empathetic engagement, the autobiographical fictions now teach us how to apply the sympathetic imagination to ourselves, complementing and refining our potential for an empathetic engagement.¹⁴⁹

Apart from praising the sympathetic imagination, Coetzee is also critical about its possibilities. As evinced in the fictionalized autobiographical novels, he has himself frequently failed at sympathizing with the other, inducing himself. Accordingly, an expression of the failure, well recognized by Coetzee, seems to be his remorse that his literature is a type of self-betrayal.

5.4. The Limits of the Sympathetic Imagination

Coetzee criticizes the Keatsian understanding of the sympathetic imagination when he seems the most supportive of it, that is, when Costello argues that her writing skills stem from her ability to sympathize with the other. Despite her emphasis on empathic receptivity, Costello can never retrieve the true voice of her characters because they are always mediated through her imagination. Her characters cannot question how she renders

149 Heister, "The Sympathetic Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee," 267.

them in her work; they are silenced. What follows is that neither Costello nor her readers can verify whether she misrepresents the other, and whether the misrepresentation is amenable to correction. There is a similar difficulty regarding literary representation of animality. Costello maintains that writers are skilled at imaginatively sympathizing with animals, yet due to the impossibility of accessing animal perception, they inevitably follow the logic of *l'animot* and, without even realizing it, they reproduce human misrepresentations of the described animals. As a counterargument, Costello claims that poetry defies *l'animot* by delivering insight into individual animals, and she provides the example of Ted Hughes, claiming that he can be put “in a line of poets who celebrate the primitive and repudiate the Western bias toward abstract thought.”¹⁵⁰ As already discussed, Costello’s claim is arguable because Hughes has access only to his idea of animality; he cannot recreate the sense-mobilities of an individual animal because the human cognitive apparatus does not allow for it. Therefore, when he writes about an individual jaguar, “the jaguar as object is fictional and [...] without a voice.”¹⁵¹ The Keatsian view of the sympathetic imagination as a quality enhanced through writing and reading seem thus to be restricted to voiceless entities.

Coetzee is aware of the limitation because one of his characters, the journalist Susan Moebius, claims that Costello is a mimic. According to Moebius, John Bernard is wrong to praise his mother for transgressing the gender boundary because such boundaries are not crossable; she claims that Costello confabulates when narrating what a male other might feel or think. Similarly to Dostoevsky from *The Master of Petersburg*, Costello would like to access the other and penetrate its identity, but instead she merely feigns such an insight. Her efforts could be compared with the confabulations the Magistrate invents when he reads the poplar slates to Colonel Joll. Therefore, although John finds his mother’s male

150 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 52.

151 Caldwell, *Imagining the Other*, 55.

characters believable, Moebius maintains that it is impossible entirely to relinquish the perspective imposed by one's gender. She perceives Costello's attempts as "parody."¹⁵²

Coetzee tests Costello's claim about the boundlessness of imagination in *Disgrace*. As mentioned in Chapter IV, after the struggle with writing the Byron opera, Lurie decides to adopt the viewpoint of Teresa, Byron's lover, not only to voice her feelings, but also for himself to understand women. Although Lurie is similar to Teresa, as they both are aging and are abandoned by their lovers, he nevertheless realizes that "he is failing her."¹⁵³ He admits that there is a limit to his sympathy that makes his insight into Teresa's perspective incomplete. The limit involves gender, age difference, and social status. Coetzee acknowledges these limitations through Lurie's attitude to women, among them his former lovers, daughter Lucy, and Bev Shaw. As for his lovers, a student named Melanie Isaacs and a prostitute called Soraya, Lurie seduces them to conceal his declining vital forces and falling social standing. He treats them as possessed goods on whom he projects his self-assumed superiority. Lurie's chauvinism does not subside after the humiliation experienced at the trial for sexual harassment, nor after the rape of his daughter. When it becomes known that Lucy is pregnant, he insists on her having an abortion, thus disregarding her right to decide about her body. Accordingly, Lucy accuses him of treating her like a minor character in his life story, and then she asks him to abandon his patriarchal mindset and stop interfering in her life. Afraid of racial mixing, Lurie cannot accept her resistance; his personal views are more important to him than his daughter's happiness. Once more, he is presented as a narcissistic character, preoccupied with his own self, and in consequence unable to sympathize with his closest relative.

Lurie perceives women as means for appeasing his sexual wants and desires. His sexist views are informed by the patriarchal ethos of male superiority and the associated

¹⁵² Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 23.

¹⁵³ Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 214.

idea of male entitlement to the female body irrespective of women's lack of consent. Lurie's utilitarian treatment of woman is confirmed by his instrumental treatment of his former lovers, Soraya and Melanie, as well as by his proprietary approach to Lucy. He sees women as childlike and unfit for physical work. He reproaches Lucy for her being a poor farmer, disregarding the fact that his words might hurt her feelings. He doubts Bev's ability to run her clinic efficiently and whether she will withstand for long, mocking her sensibility and attachment to animals, and viewing her empathy for them as naive. Perceiving women as subordinate to men, Lurie feels justified in patronizing women regardless of their consent. He orders them about, imposing his will on them. It seems that his roughness about women stems from his inability to sympathize with them. The inability strongly resonates with his detached, self-regarding rationalism, detectable in his purely theoretical preoccupation with Romantic poetry, and in his instrumental approach to animals.

It can be claimed that, unlike Costello, Lurie cannot cross the gender boundary. He excuses himself by maintaining that his behavior is natural for men and that he is entitled to use women as a means for satisfying his sexual desires. As he argues, female beauty is a common good, thus women ought to share it with men by allowing access to their bodies. It is noteworthy that while he accords such a sexist right to himself, a white male, he denies it to the black men who gang-rape his daughter. His egoism not only permeates through his sexist views, but it is also visible in his racism. Accordingly, the lacks in Lurie's sympathetic imagination emerge in his chauvinistic views of women and through his racial prejudice against black people. In more general terms, it could be argued that his failed sympathy stems from his self-projected elitism, of which sexism and racism are secondary symptoms.

Despite his doubt about the male ability to understand female perspectives, a number

of Coetzee's characters are women. There are also black-skinned protagonists in his prose: Michael K and Friday. It is quite probable that Coetzee is not entirely adamant about the limits of the sympathetic imagination. Rather, he sees its potential in enabling the writer as a "secretary of the invisible,"¹⁵⁴ that is, as a means enabling him to speak for others, without claiming any authority over their voices. In her feminist reading of Coetzee's work, Lucy Graham, a University of Oxford scholar, argues that Coetzee portrays Costello not as a "site of authority, [but as] a 'medium' between one sphere of existence and another."¹⁵⁵ By presenting contradictory views over the possibilities of the sympathetic imagination, "Coetzee stages an abdication from a position of power,"¹⁵⁶ nevertheless implying that authorship entails not only mimicry but also responsibility.

Coetzee refers to the responsibilities of the author in "Evil," the fifth Lesson of *Elizabeth Costello*. Graham defines writing as a means for expressing other voices, but she does not refer to the ethical aspect of authorship. For Costello, due to the sympathetic imagination, authors gain insight into good and evil and serve as a medium for each. Because of the insight, an ethical writer cannot be a mere transmitter; instead, he/she is responsible for preventing evil from being transmitted and spread around through literature. In this regard, Coetzee advocates imposing "limits on the sympathetic imagination"¹⁵⁷ by censoring texts which he refers to as "obscene."¹⁵⁸ The demand is voiced by Costello during her lecture on Paul West's book *The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg*, a 1991 novel featuring detailed descriptions of the torture and death experienced by the failed assassin of Adolf Hitler, Claus von Stauffenberg.¹⁵⁹ As Costello maintains, "certain things are not good to read *or to write*. [...] I take it seriously to claim

154 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 199.

155 Lucy Valerie Graham, "Textual Transvestism: The Female Voices of J. M. Coetzee," in Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, 223.

156 Graham, "Textual Transvestism: The Female Voices of J. M. Coetzee," 233.

157 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 175-6.

158 Ibid., 168.

159 Paul West, *The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg* (New York: Overlook Press, 1991).

that the artist risks a great deal by venturing into forbidden places: risks, specifically, himself; risks, perhaps, all.”¹⁶⁰ She warns against writing and reading about evil because, due to the aestheticizing function of literature, evil may appear attractive, hence it may easily corrupt people. In a sense, she warns against the situation from *The Master of Petersburg* in which Dostoevsky secretly desires the villain and, consequently, he produces a work, *Demons*, in which evil looks attractive to the reader. Such an attitude is congruent with the pedagogical ideals of Kant according to which proper behavior is achieved through exposure to ethically correct actions and avoidance of the improper ones.

It is noteworthy that despite her objection to aestheticizing brutality, Costello’s portrayals of animal suffering are similar to West’s description of von Stauffenberg’s torture. Costello reflects on the similarity after the lecture and admits to her inconsistency. Her self-reflective criticism is rendered in the ensuing quote:

Until she thought better of it, she had no qualms about rubbing people’s faces in, for instance, what went on in abattoirs. [...] She, no less than Paul West, knew how to play with words until she got them right, the words that would send an electric shock down the spine of the reader. *Butcherfolk in our own way*.¹⁶¹

By exposing Costello’s similarity to Paul West, Coetzee demonstrates that the position of an author is not fixed. Writers exert influence on their audience but they are also influenced by external factors, thus it is important that they cherish proper values, and that they persist with them when attracted by evil. Such a vision of self-conscious authorship is confirmed in “At the Gate,” the final Lesson of *Elizabeth Costello*. Here Coetzee argues that it is impossible to be a mere “secretary of the invisible,” that is, to abandon one’s private perspective and be neutral in writing. One should investigate one’s beliefs and verify their moral quality. Coetzee asks his readers for self-reflection over the moral qualification of what they are attracted to. He acknowledges that such a moral self-

¹⁶⁰ Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 173 (emphasis original).

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 179 (emphasis original).

evaluation is not easy or quick by depicting Costello who, on the one hand, condemns reading about evil but, on the other hand, admits her excitement about reading West's book. Coetzee pinpoints her excitement not to expose her hypocrisy, but rather to show that reciprocity and the sympathetic imagination fail without proper ethics, or when they are based on an incomplete or falsified image of oneself. An epitome of such a failure is Paul Rayment in *Slow Man*.

5.5. *Slow Man*: The Sympathetic Imagination and the Limits of Reciprocity

As demonstrated before, Costello's idea of sympathetic imagination can be related to Kant's rule of reciprocity, according to which people refrain from hurting one another because of their ability to sympathize with each other. Such an understanding of the sympathetic imagination is referred to in *Slow Man* when Costello explains to Drago why Rayment has become infatuated with his mother, Mrs. Marijana Jokić:

‘Imagine: you are sixty years old and suddenly one morning you wake up head over heels in love with a woman who is not only younger than you by a quarter of a century but also married, happily married, more or less. What would you do?’ Slowly Drago shakes his head. ‘That’s not a fair question. If I’m sixteen, how do I know what it is like to be sixty? It’s different if you’re sixty – then you can remember. But ... It’s Mr Rayment we are talking about, right? How can I be Mr Rayment if I can't get inside him?’¹⁶²

Despite Costello’s urging, Drago claims that he cannot sympathize with Rayment because of the substantial age difference between them. According to Costello, the success of the sympathetic imagination stems from shared experiences, among them the experience of embodiment, but Drago’s reply proves that she is only partially right; there are factors, such as age difference, which limit the scope of the sympathetic imagination. They also

162 Coetzee, *Slow Man* (2005; London: Vintage Books, 2006), 137-138.

incapacitate reciprocity; Drago seems to resent Rayment for interfering in his family's life. Accordingly, Costello is wrong to argue that embodiment is enough for people to sympathize with one another; apart from the body, there are other factors, among them gender, handicap and ethnicity, that affect the extent of one's sympathy.

It can be argued that people of similar age and of the same gender and ethnicity find it easier to sympathize with each other because of their shared experiences. The same appears to be true about handicap and other afflictions. However, Rayment has difficulty reciprocating with Marianna, a blind woman whom he meets in hospital. Initially, he appears to sympathize with her, he pities her condition, and at a certain point they grow affectionate and make love. However, although they are both handicapped, Rayment soon denies their similarity and abandons Marianna. As it appears, he projects himself as unsuitable for a relationship with a disabled person in order to suppress his own disability. He ends the affair for fear of being perceived as "a diminished man."¹⁶³ Undoubtedly, his willingness to reciprocate is limited; while he understands Marianna's predicament, he does not return her affection. Abandoning her, he uses his knowledge to differentiate himself from Marianna and, by extension, from all impaired people. Knowledge gained from his sympathetic insight seems to counter Rayment's reciprocity.

To further differentiate himself from the disabled, Rayment rejects devices which would help him manage his deficiency, among them a prosthetic leg and a bicycle remodeled for one-legged people. As he admits, he does it in order not to "expose [himself] to the gaze of an outsider,"¹⁶⁴ and to avoid being perceived as a disabled. Such motivation confirms that Rayment is a self-centered character interested in his public image and unsympathetic to the feelings of individual people. Another example of his egoism is when he feels relieved that Marianna cannot see his missing leg. His diminished

¹⁶³ Ibid., 32-33.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 38.

sympathy also emerges when he refers to her as better “attuned”¹⁶⁵ to disability. Rayment knows how Marianna feels; as handicapped, he can think his way into her situation, and yet he refuses to sympathize with her. Contrary to what Costello claims, there seems to be a limit to his sympathetic imagination, which shows through narcissism and a failure to reciprocate Marianna's love.

Rayment's limited sympathy is also evinced by his attitude to the family of his nurse, Marijana Jokič. Both Rayment and the Jokičs are immigrants to Australia. The former comes from France; the latter are Croats. Thus it should be easy for Rayment to sympathize with Marijana and her relatives. However, Rayment distinguishes himself from the Jokičs by designating them as more alien to the Australian society than he is himself. One way of doing it is by pointing out their language inaccuracies. When Marijana calls Rayment “a book keeper,”¹⁶⁶ he corrects her calque by saying that in proper English he should be called “a book collector.”¹⁶⁷ Such a remark stresses Marijana's ethnic otherness and, at the same time, it obscures Rayment's immigrant history. Curiously, despite his fluent English, Rayment admits to forming his thoughts in French. Not only is his sympathy limited, but he also turns out to be a hypocrite. Rayment is “not unfamiliar with the immigrant experience,”¹⁶⁸ yet by exposing the Jokičs' linguistic inaccuracies, he dissimulates his own origins, presumably in order to disconnect himself from his immigrant past.

Continuing the denial of his immigrant identity, Rayment puts himself in a position of authority by volunteering as the Jokičs' benefactor. He declares that he will pay for Drago's schooling. However, when Drago steals a photograph from Rayment's private collection of Antoine Fauchery's photography and tempers with its content by using a

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 111.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 47.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 192.

computer program, Rayment becomes violent and disparaging to the Jokičs. Antoine Fauchery is the co-author of the Fauchery-Daintree collection of ancient photography picturing early settlers in Australia and Aborigines. Rayment seems to perceive his collection of Faucherys as a confirmation of his belonging to the Australian society. Judging by his overreaction, it could be argued that Rayment offers his help to the Jokičs not out of sympathy but to project himself as their host, thereby further confirming his sense of Australianness. He could also be doing it out of his feeling of superiority over the less privileged Jokič family. A symptom of such a motivation is Rayment's excitement at what looks like buying Marijana: when he offers her a financial help, "he is drunk with the pleasure of having her back, excited too by the money he is about to give away."¹⁶⁹ By patronizing the immigrant family, he distances himself from their shared immigrant background. However, by estranging the Jokičs, he is also estranging himself, for they all belong to the same category of the other.

Rayment's sympathetic imagination is limited with regard to the Jokičs. He is angry with Drago, he accuses him of destroying his property, yet at the same time he seems to understand his motives. The understanding stems from their shared immigrant desire to fit into the new society. Contrary to Costello's claims, while shared background may improve imagination, it does not mean that it always improves mutual sympathy. Despite shared experiences, people do not necessarily reciprocate each other's feelings. As the case of Rayment shows, it may even lead to mutual antagonism.

Rayment evinces the antagonism after Drago spoils one of the ancient photographs. Rayment hopes that by bequeathing his collection of Faucherys to a museum or other cultural institution, he will earn recognition and membership in Australian identity. It could be argued that by inserting an image of his relative into one of Rayment's Faucherys, Drago does the same, although his actions are more literal, and also more

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 92.

naive. Symbolically, Drago's gesture is similar to Rayment's plans: they both strive to fit into the Australian society. For both of them, the photo serves as a way of earning their Australian identity. As Rayment says, "he [Drago] must be feeling his way into what it is like to have an Australian past, an Australian descent, Australian forebears of the mystical variety. Instead of being just a refugee with a joke name."¹⁷⁰ Rayment knows Drago's perspective, meeting the requirements of the sympathetic imagination, and yet he shows no sympathy for him. He is harsh and unrelenting in his accusations against the youth. Judging by the standards of Kant's deontological ethics, according to which intentions are the measure of morality, Rayment's attitude to Drago is unjust, therefore, morally deficient. The deficiency surfaces through Rayment's lack of sympathy for Drago. It also pinpoints a failure in Costello's reasoning that imagination prompts sympathy. It could be argued that an insight into the other's circumstances forecloses a sympathetic response in *Slow Man*; Rayment shows no understanding of Drago because he knows Drago's intentions. He uses the knowledge not to sympathize with Drago but rather to put himself in a position of dominance and avoid being identified as an immigrant. Rayment does not sympathize with the boy, not because he cannot, but because it is more convenient for his narcissistic ego. In this manner, Coetzee demonstrates the Keatsian understanding of the sympathetic imagination to be at times limited, especially in the context of the Kantian requirement of moral improvement.

It could be claimed that Rayment antagonizes the Jokičs because of their similarities. The antagonism is self-defeating because Rayment and the Jokičs share the status of fictional characters in Coetzee's writing, meaning that in ontological terms there is no difference between them. Costello informs Rayment about his status, yet he refuses to acknowledge it, rejecting his affinity with the other characters of the novel. He prefers to remain ignorant. Denying Costello's input, he calls her a predator, an intruder, presumably

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 191-192.

because she undermines his vision of the world and, perhaps more importantly, of himself. Denial is his opposition to Costello's urge to be an interesting character. For Costello, Rayment is boring; she asks him to improve and be more involving. She wants him to live a life of passion, and she prompts him to emulate such literary characters as Emma Bovary or Don Quixote. She urges him to "push"¹⁷¹ himself, as does "a woman in labor"¹⁷² during childbirth, and become interesting. To Costello, Rayment serves as a source of literary material. It could thus be argued that she objectifies him. However, Rayment opposes her impositions. One of the moments when he objects to her is when he "shakes his head helplessly"¹⁷³ at her demands. On the one hand, such a gesture could be interpreted as a sign of weakness, but on the other, it could also be perceived as a gesture of silent defiance, characteristic of those who feel dominated or those unheard due to their underprivileged position.¹⁷⁴

Rayment's defiance recalls the opposition by the colonized described in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) by Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), an Afro-Caribbean philosopher and a revolutionary. Fanon argues that one of the symptoms of the colonizers' power in the colonies was the gaze they directed at the people they subdued. The gaze was obtrusive; colonizers looked at the conquered natives as if they were objects of a scientific scrutiny, research material, similar to animals or rare plant species, without the object's permission or active involvement. The colonized felt thing-like and objectified; it was denigrating to them. Fanon describes the experience as humiliating but also enervating: "I move slowly in the world [...]. I progress by crawling. And already, I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed* [;] they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare."¹⁷⁵ Similarly, Costello perplexes Rayment through close observation and a

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 83.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 203.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Caldwell, *Imagining the Other*, 85-87.

¹⁷⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (1952; London: Pluto Press, 2008), 87 (emphasis original).

scientific documentation of his life. She exploits Rayment for her own purposes, disregarding his feelings or needs. Like a colonized subject, Rayment has no means of opposition but a passive defiance. Therefore, while in one sense Rayment disappoints Costello, in another, he resists Costello's domination by disappointing her literary expectations of him. Rayment does not want to be exploited, and being boring is an indirect way in which he opposes being objectified as a source of intriguing plots.

There is a sense in which Rayment's defiance progresses from passivity to a more active form. It is when he voices his disagreement with Costello: "I am not a hero, Mrs Costello. Losing a leg does not qualify one for a dramatic role. Losing a leg is neither tragic nor comic, just unfortunate."¹⁷⁶ Rayment protests against using his life as literary material. He also resists Costello's assessments of him, such as when she refers to him as cold: "[n]ot cold, he will say, and not French either [but] a man who sees the world in his own way and who [...] not too long ago lost part of his own body."¹⁷⁷ Assuming that Costello is Coetzee's literary *alter ego*, it could be argued that through Rayment's defiance, Coetzee challenges the assumption that characters remain voiceless in relation to their authors. As already shown, Rayment does oppose Costello, which results in stopping her colonizer-like intrusions on his privacy. Accordingly, it seems that for Coetzee characters do gain at least partial independence from their creators, meaning that the efficacy of their sympathetic imagination can be verified, mainly through a close analysis of their language, motives and values.

Defying Costello's misrepresentations of his life, Rayment declares at some point in the novel: "this is not a comedy," accusing her of trivializing his life by treating him as literary material. However, when an author negotiates with his/her own characters, and when he/she is rebuked by them, such a situation is little nothing but a comedy. Coetzee

¹⁷⁶ Coetzee, *Slow Man*, 117.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 162 (emphasis original).

mocks Costello and her Keatsian understanding of the sympathetic imagination by compromising her as an author. The fiasco stems from her inability to insight her own characters. On the one hand, she praises the virtues of sympathetic insight into the other; on the other hand, however, she cannot access and influence the products of her own imagination. Her actions contradict her claims.

5.6. Coetzee's Further Critique of the Sympathetic Imagination

It should be remembered that Costello is not a real-life person, but solely an author-character created by Coetzee to challenge the Keatsian idea of the authorial sympathetic imagination. On the one hand, she is writing fiction, but on the other, she is written into it. Therefore, it could be argued that her relations with Coetzee parallel the relation between herself and Rayment. Unquestionably, *Slow Man* is a multilayered narrative structure, and since Costello permeates all its levels, she should be treated as an intermediate voice occupying the space between writers and their characters. To determine her position more accurately, one should verify whether Costello can be considered Coetzee's mouthpiece. Despite ample analysis, it is still not certain whether she is his genuine *alter ego*, and whether her views can always be treated as congruent with those of Coetzee.

It seems that the closest to capturing Costello's status is Terry Eagleton, a Trinity College scholar, who in a review of *Slow Man* defines her as a "secret emissary of the author himself,"¹⁷⁸ implying that Coetzee has created Costello to test the nature of authorship and the scope of the authorial sympathetic imagination. In this sense, Eagleton acknowledges a distance between Coetzee and the character; a symptom of the distance is Coetzee's self-imposed restriction on adopting Costello's perspective. Admittedly, neither

178 Terry Eagleton, "A Slow Redemption," review of *Slow Man*, by J. M. Coetzee, *Lancet* 366, no. 9501 (December 3, 2005): 1917, [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(05\)67773-2/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(05)67773-2/fulltext).

in *Slow Man*, nor in any other work featuring Costello, does Coetzee assume her point of view. She is always presented from the third person perspective. It could accordingly be claimed that by avoiding the first person narration, Coetzee confirms his doubts about the validity of the authorial sympathetic imagination, implying in an almost open manner that no author, even himself, has an unlimited insight into his/her characters. The reason for such a limitation refers to the problematic addressed in “At the Gate,” that is, the impossibility of shedding one’s personal view and being neutral. Rayment formulates the issue in the following manner: “surely you don’t scribble down the first thing that comes to your head and mail it off to your publisher. Surely you wait for the second thoughts. Surely you revise. Isn’t the whole of writing a matter of second thoughts – second thoughts and third thoughts and further thought?”¹⁷⁹ Confirming Rayment’s view of her style of working, Costello eventually realizes the limitations of her approach, admitting that as an author she follows intuitions rather than factual knowledge. It is in this sense that she occupies an intermediary ground between the limits and possibilities of the sympathetic imagination; she does have an insight into the other, but the insight is intuitively rather than objectively certain.

Costello relies on her own personal viewpoint, and following the rule of reciprocity, she lets Rayment act on his own and be natural. She shares with him the ensuing thought: “it does not have to be this way, Paul [,] this is your story, not mine. The moment you decide to take charge, I will fade away. You will hear no more from me; it will be as if I had never existed.”¹⁸⁰ However, allowing for freedom does not encourage Rayment’s efforts; it rather reinforces his estrangement from her. The following passage testifies to his growing mistrust about her intentions: Rayment feels that Costello is “like a sea beating against his skull [...], for all he knows he could be already lost overboard, tugged

¹⁷⁹ Coetzee, *Slow Man*, 228.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 100.

to and fro by the currents of the deep.”¹⁸¹ She is also compared to a dog. Initially, Rayment has “the feeling that [...] he need only reach down and his fingers will encounter Elizabeth Costello, stretched out on the carpet like a dog, watching and waiting.”¹⁸² By likening her to a pet, Rayment thinks of Costello as a sort of friend, or a guardian, someone to rely on. However, the dog-like presence of Costello soon becomes menacing; Rayment finds her constant observation disturbing. After reading what she has written about him, he realizes that she has abused him by transgressing his privacy. He thinks of her intrusion into his life as predatory and parasitic. As the following passage reveals, Rayment is shocked by how much she knows about him:

she knows everything; every jot and tittle. Damn her! All the time he thought he was his own master he has been in a cage like a rat, darting this way and that, yammering to himself, with the infernal woman standing over him, observing, listening, taking notes, recording his progress.¹⁸³

As the quote demonstrates, Rayment feels helpless and pestered by Costello. She intimidates him, and consequently he proceeds to associate her not with canine safety but rather with the cunningness of foxes: “prowling from room to room in the dark, sniffing, on the hunt.”¹⁸⁴ Instead of being reassured, Rayment feels endangered and unsettled by Costello’s constant presence. By employing the dog and fox metaphors, Coetzee demonstrates that understanding is at times disturbed by one’s attempts at sympathetic insight, especially when it is not reciprocated.¹⁸⁵

Rayment thinks that Costello has trespassed on his privacy; he feels abused and manipulated by her. The question is whether the sympathetic imagination necessitates such an interference into another’s life, and whether a fictional character’s privacy should be respected, and on what grounds. Coetzee does not provide straightforward answers, yet

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid., 112.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 122.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 123.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Caldwell, *Imagining the Other*, 88-89.

considering the intrusive nature of Costello's dealings with Rayment, and her eventual failure, it could be claimed that Coetzee doubts the efficiency of the sympathetic imagination.

5.7. Imagination and the Ethical Role of Literature

In "At the Gate," Costello argues that the role of the sympathetic imagination is to make imaginary creations, characters and events credible without actually experiencing them. She relates the view to her profession as a fiction writer. When asked by the judges for a moral justification of her writing, she answers that she is "a secretary of the invisible, one of many secretaries over the ages [,] dictation secretary."¹⁸⁶ As she maintains, she does not judge what "passes through her."¹⁸⁷ However, her impartiality is problematic for the judges. They claim that in her books she makes "one judgement upon another,"¹⁸⁸ therefore, her claim of being an impartial intermediary of senses cannot be genuine. They refer to her as "bankrupt of conscience."¹⁸⁹ Costello eventually succumbs to their pressure and, after reflection, she admits to having convictions.

Costello realizes that her impartiality claim is not exceptional. Toward the end of the story, she asks the clerk at the gate if there are more petitioners like her, "people in [her] situation,"¹⁹⁰ and the answer she receives is "[a]ll the time [...]. We see people like you all the time."¹⁹¹ Coetzee seems to argue that other people also simulate truth; he also implies that it is impossible to account for the reality without a dose of fiction. In his view, fiction appears inevitable in perception and, further, in understanding. Before receiving the

¹⁸⁶ Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 199.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 200.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 203.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 204.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 224.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 225.

answer from the clerk, Costello has the following vision:

She has a vision of the gate, the far side of the gate, the side she is denied. At the foot of the gate, blocking the way, lies stretched out a dog, an old dog, his lion-coloured hide scarred from innumerable mangleings. His eyes are closed, he is resting, snoozing. Beyond him is nothing but a desert of sand and stone, to infinity. It is her first vision in a long while, and she does not trust it, does not trust in particular the anagram GOD-DOG. *Too literary*, she thinks again. A curse on literature!¹⁹²

In the above passage, Coetzee refers to what seems to be a paradox: fiction, not only in the sense of literature but also in the sense of confabulation, contributes to the understanding of reality. He implies the paradox by comparing the panel of judges to the “Mad Tea-Party” from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865): “[t]hey cannot contain themselves, her panel of judges, her board. First they titter like children, then they abandon all dignity and howl with laughter.”¹⁹³ Apart from a reference to Lewis Carroll’s novel, there is also an allusion to Kafka, a novelist famous for the nightmarish illogicalities of his fictional world. Costello recognizes similar illogicalities of her own situation: “of course this is not a court of law. Not even a court of logic. Her first impression was right: a court out of Kafka or *Alice in Wonderland*, a court of paradox.”¹⁹⁴ Although such a vision is rather disturbing, Costello is not surprised by its paradox; it looks as if she expected it or she has already been reconciled to its inevitability. Accordingly, through Costello’s story, Coetzee demonstrates that fiction may prove helpful in reconciling oneself to the illogicalities of the surrounding world.

The question is whether fiction can help with understanding such illogicalities. The answer seems to involve the idea of creative imagination, stereotypically assigned to artists, and described by Coetzee as “the parody at work [attributable to] the mimetic

¹⁹² Ibid., 224-225.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 221.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 223.

nature of writing and performance.”¹⁹⁵ As already argued, imagination contributes to actual experience, therefore, apart from improving knowledge, it also fosters morality. In Coetzee's view, one of the most effective means of stimulating imagination is literature; through Costello's words, he praises fiction for drawing the readers' attention to contexts, uncertainties and emotions. Cora Diamond recognizes the introspective character of literature as the basis for its ethical role. She argues that “it is perfectly intelligible to think of convictions of the heart, and to regard literature as having moral force because of its ability to address them.”¹⁹⁶ The predilection of literature to prompt moral sensitivity stems from its close involvement with imagination.

Such a view of literature has been held since the Enlightenment but it developed mainly in the twentieth century. According to Woessner, “a central part of the novel’s attempt [has been] to educate our sentiment.”¹⁹⁷ Numerous Enlightenment figures, among them David Hume, Adam Smith, and J. J. Rousseau, chose the novel as the preferred means of moral instruction, cultivating “in their readers a refined sense of empathy”¹⁹⁸ via fiction. The intellectual historian Jerrold Seigel (b. 1936), a New York University scholar, asserts the educational role of literature in the Enlightenment by claiming that “[l]iterary culture was increasingly serving readers and writers in Smith’s times as the site where participation in the lives of others served as a vehicle of self-formation.”¹⁹⁹ Therefore, it could be argued that imaginary participation in another’s emotional states stimulated moral development of the eighteenth century writers and readers. With other notable thinkers, among them Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, the Enlightenment appreciation

195 Laura Wright, “A Feminist-Vegetarian Defence of Elizabeth Costello: A Rant from an Ethical Academic on J. M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*,” in Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, 212.

196 Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal*, 14. Cf. Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

197 Woessner, “Coetzee’s Critique of Reason,” 235.

198 *Ibid.*, 234.

199 Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 160.

of the formative qualities of literature should, however, be treated as an exception to a general depreciation of literature's role in stimulating morals and understanding. Beginning with Plato, who banished poets from his ideal republic for fear of their corruptive influence on truth, thinkers were apprehensive about relating fiction to philosophy. It was not until the twentieth century and the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, and notably Richard Rorty (1931-2007), an American neopragmatist philosopher, that the literary dimension of philosophy began to be properly addressed. Wittgenstein recognized the discursive nature of meaning; he addressed it in his theory of language games. Heidegger claimed that meaning is disclosed by literature, in particular by poetry. For Rorty, literature is the realm where imagination prospers, and since "imagination has priority over reason [as] imagination creates the [language] games that reason needs to play,"²⁰⁰ literature, in Rorty's view, turns out to be the ultimate site of moral education. Accordingly, in his work *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (1989), he encourages a "general turn against theory and toward narrative."²⁰¹ Rorty claimed that literature was a sign of maturity, both personal and cultural, and that it established the limits of the Western thought.²⁰²

Rorty's recognition of literature is frequently praised by Martha Nussbaum (b. 1947), a University of Chicago scholar, who strives "to bring novels to moral philosophy,"²⁰³ but without substituting them for it. In her view, the task of fiction is to approximate abstract ideas, and to complement philosophy. Nussbaum's inspiration seems to be Iris Murdoch (1919-1999), an Anglo-Irish novelist and philosopher, who opted for the primacy of literature before philosophy. Murdoch claimed that the novel improves morality better than

200 Richard Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 115.

201 Richard Rorty, introduction to *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xvi.

202 Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, 89-104.

203 Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 24.

philosophical analysis because of literature's emphasis on imagination and sympathy. In her view, "the most essential and fundamental aspect of culture is the study of literature, since this is an education in how to picture and understand human situations."²⁰⁴ Murdoch claims that people are not decision-making machines guided by pure rationality; instead, they are emotional beings, therefore, it is important to cultivate their imagination so they can sympathize with others and, in effect, reciprocate each others' feelings. Literature expedites the cultivation, thus, in Murdoch's view, it should be included in the considerations of moral philosophy. Her ideas parallel Kant's contention that aesthetic experience can improve morality by stimulating imagination and sensitivity. Murdoch's ideas are confirmed and further developed by Cora Diamond and Alice Crary; while for Diamond literature is important because it directly addresses the difficulty of reality, in Crary's opinion literature reveals morality not only as the site of judgements and reasoned justifications, but predominantly as the realm of will and preference. Crary appears attracted to Murdoch's claim in the following quote: "we are moral agents before we are scientists."²⁰⁵ Both Diamond and Crary argue that literature enhances people's ability to imaginatively sympathize with others, both human and non-human.²⁰⁶

As the above examples demonstrate, the predilection of literature to promote ethical attitudes stems from its involvement with imagination, and a rather loose relation to science, philosophy and analytical reason. Considering his emphasis on the sympathetic imagination, Coetzee can be included among the thinkers who recognize the importance of literature's formative qualities. Specifically, he transposes ethical questions from the realm of philosophy to literature in order to expose them to multiple perspectives. Pain is one of such issues; as Martin Woessner argues, "Coetzee [...] dramatizes pain; he pushes it into

204 Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 34.

205 Ibid.

206 Woessner, "Coetzee's Critique of Reason," 226-227.

the space of imagination where it can be accessed by others”²⁰⁷ and, through sympathy, experienced almost personally. In Coetzee’s view, imagination fosters understanding by furnishing “forms of critical reflection [...] with which we are perhaps more familiar in extraphilosophical contexts,”²⁰⁸ but which extend our perspective, stimulating our moral and cognitive sensitivity.

The above thought is confirmed in the following claim by Costello:

I have a literal cast of mind, so I would like to stop with the bat. When Kafka writes about an ape, I take him to be talking in the first place about an ape; when Nagel writes about a bat, I take him to be writing, in the first place, about a bat.²⁰⁹

By a literal cast of mind, Costello does not mean any factual rendition of reality, including real-life apes and bats; what she rather means is imaginative reconstructing and conveying the underlying reality of the discussed entities. For Stephen Mulhall, Costello’s use of the phrase “is in fact imaginative, even ironic; she takes it that anyone who takes up the word ‘bat’ has a responsibility thereby [...] to use it in ways that really are responsive to the reality of the creature to which it refers, hence she is obliged to exercise the imagination necessary to apprehend that reality.”²¹⁰ Imagination is thus presented as a means to a comprehensive understanding of another’s reality.

Coetzee relates literary imagination to animals in his 2003 essay “What Does It Mean ‘to Understand’?” He reflects on the predicament of the writer who recounts the experience of an animal. On the one hand, the author knows that he/she is not rendering the creature’s internal impressions, as this is impossible, but on the other hand, in order to write the story, the author must presuppose that he/she does access the animal’s inner life. Such a position involves a paradox, not only because it necessitates a believable illusion of

207 Ibid., 234.

208 Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal*, 9.

209 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 32.

210 Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal*, 35.

reality, but mainly because such an illusion influences the way the reality is understood. Accordingly, due to the paradox, literature can serve as a means for improving the readers' behavior, knowledge and sensitivity, including sympathy for animals. As Kant would have argued, literature may train the audience's character, elements of which are the faculties of aesthetic and moral sensitivity. Coetzee explains the paradox by comparing it to a lesson of tennis. A tennis trainer teaches a player how to play with verbal commands; he demonstrates the correct strokes and techniques so that the player observes, repeats and eventually plays tennis. Similarly, a storyteller presents characters so that the reader imaginatively inhabits them, and then incorporates their experiences as his/her own.

Claims Coetzee:

A storyteller telling a story about a fox who thinks crafty thoughts and does crafty things knows, in some sense, that he has no access to the fox's mind, that he is merely performing an imitation of what a fox, as conventionally understood within human culture, would "think" if foxes could think. The same storyteller nevertheless finds it convenient to think to himself that he is telling his story from within the fox's mind.²¹¹

It seems that in Coetzee's view of literature functions in a similar way to the logic of Kant's transcendental illusion. Literature is based on a mere imitation, but for the imitation to have an effect on one's imagination, the imaginer should presuppose that what he/she experiences while reading is not an imitation. The imaginer ought to convince himself/herself that he/she is inhabiting another. It is a correlate of this paradox that the above discussed thinkers, among them Rorty, Murdoch and Nussbaum, refer to when they praise the formative qualities of literature. Coetzee identifies the correlate with the sympathetic imagination. It can thus be argued that, for Coetzee, it is the logic of Kantian transcendental illusion that properly reveals the possibilities of the sympathetic imagination, not the pseudo-psychological theories of Romantic poets, among them Keats.

211 John Maxwell Coetzee, "What Does It Mean 'to Understand'?", *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology* 10 (June 2003): 134.

Conclusion

Coetzee puts into doubt the Keatsian understanding of the sympathetic imagination. In *Elizabeth Costello* he criticizes the idea of an author's unlimited insight; in *Slow Man*, he extends his criticism by "provid[ing] a closer view of the authorial power of manipulation."²¹² Through Rayment, he demonstrates that fictional characters are not always accessible to their creators as they can oppose the authorial intrusions, either by direct defiance or by disappointing the authors' expectations. In *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee indicates that knowledge does not suffice to think one's way into the being of another; in his view, a valid understanding requires the sympathetic imagination. However, in *Slow Man*, even that basis is questioned; the doubt is mediated by the impossibility of separating subjective perceptions from claims based on one's imaginative insight. Accordingly, despite her accurate description of his deeds, Costello is accused of unsympathetic manipulations of Rayment's motives and feelings. She challenges Rayment's requirement for a faithful representation of literary characters by doubting whether truthfulness is necessary for morally instructive literature. She poses the following question: "does it matter if it [the story] is true? Surely it is not up to me to play God, separating the sheep from the goats, dismissing the false stories, preserving the true."²¹³ Admittedly, as has been argued in literary criticism, "Coetzee reveals that, for Costello, truthfulness matters less than serving as a storyteller."²¹⁴ A successful sympathetic imager does not have to be true to facts in recreating another's inner life; it is enough to be emotive, intellectually provoking, and morally obliging. It can be argued that, according

212 Pankaj Mishra, "The Uncertainty Principle," review of *Slow Man*, by J. M. Coetzee, *The Nation* 14 (November 2005): 40, <https://www.thenation.com/article/uncertainty-principle/>.

213 Coetzee, *Slow Man*, 202-203.

214 Caldwell, *Imagining the Other*, 100.

to Coetzee, fiction meets the demands as long as the author and the reader follow the logic of Kantian transcendental illusion, that is, as long as they treat fiction as a basis of valid understanding.

Chapter VI

John Maxwell Coetzee's Animal Ethics and the Possibilities of the Sympathetic Imagination

The tenet of *The Lives of Animals* is an imaginative insight into the emotional states of other beings, notably animals, and the associated critique of instrumental rationalism. Through his literary *alter ego*, a character called Elizabeth Costello, Coetzee adopts the Keatsian notion of the sympathetic imagination and presents it as a means for developing a successful ethics of animality. In *Disgrace*, *Elizabeth Costello*, and *Slow Man* he further examines the notion's possibilities by checking its applicability across gender, age, and disability. Throughout the analyzed novels, Coetzee seems to posit the sympathetic imagination as a supplement to reason, thus arguing for a paralogical conception of rationality. The present chapter investigates Coetzee's final stance on the possibilities of the sympathetic imagination with respect to animals. The chapter argues that, for Coetzee, the sympathetic imagination, as a supplement for rational thinking, is limited, but necessary for including animals in ethical consideration. In the chapter it is maintained that Coetzee's views on animal ethics are weakly anthropocentric, that they conform with Kant's deontological ethics, and that they may be related to the logic of the Kantian transcendental illusion, especially when it comes to the possibilities of the sympathetic imagination. Another reference to Kant is Coetzee's dialectical approach to the discursiveness of reason and imagination. The chapter is concluded by a discussion about the ethical aspects of Coetzee's rendition of animal death.

6.1. The Possibilities of the Sympathetic Imagination

From the beginning of *Disgrace*, David Lurie is shown as an unsympathetic womanizer who, unlike the poets he studies, Wordsworth and Byron, has no genuine passion in life. Living in hedonistic abandon, he seduces young women, thus pacifying his fears of getting old. Despite his admiration for female beauty, he seems unwilling to emotionally engage with his lovers. There appears no love in his life, nor any other genuine reciprocal feeling. His sympathetic imagination is in decline, and he seems little concerned about it, even when it costs him a university position and public dishonor. Indifference appears to be the prevailing feature of his character. Lurie emerges as a paragon of male chauvinism, mediated through a theme of cynicism and female subjugation, displayed mainly before the disciplinary committee of his university. As argues Florence Stratton, a scholar of University of Regina, Canada, Lurie “encodes an allegory of colonialism”¹ characterized by his white elitism, patriarchalism and hypocrisy. However, Kate McInturff, from University of Ottawa, claims that Lurie's repellent image is a narrative means used by Coetzee to demonstrate the possibility of change, even in an old, narcissistic libertarian such as Lurie is shown to be. In her 2007 article “Rex Oedipus: The Ethics of Sympathy in Recent Work by J. M. Coetzee,” McInturff argues:

The character of David is, himself, notoriously unsympathetic to the novel's readers. The portrayal of David as stubborn, self-indulgent, and sexist (or misogynist) is itself a provocation to the reader to consider the difficulties inherent in sympathising with another being and to avoid the failures represented by David's own attempts at sympathy.²

The above passage implies that Coetzee's purpose in *Disgrace* is not only to present

1 Florence Stratton, “Imperial Fictions: J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*,” *ARIEL* 33, no. 3-4 (2002): 85.

2 Kate McInturff, “Rex Oedipus: The Ethics of Sympathy in Recent Work by J. M. Coetzee,” *Postcolonial Text* 3, no. 4 (2007): 8.

Lurie's journey toward his own self-improvement, but also to encourage his readership to a more sympathetic consideration for both human and non-human beings.

Despite his unfavorable view of black people and fears of interracial mixing, Lurie sleeps with a Muslim prostitute, Soraya, and is sexually attracted to his Colored student, Melanie. As writes Lucy Graham, a scholar of the University of the Western Cape, in his pursuit of exotic women, Lurie epitomizes the colonial pattern of white dominance, detectable, among other places, in the Western fascination with non-white women. In Graham's view, "Lurie has a history of desiring 'exotic' women, and assumes that he has the right to purchase or possess their bodies without being responsible for them or respecting the lives they live."³ Graham's negative view of Lurie is confirmed by his lack of interest in Soraya as a person, in her private life, and in her opinions and feelings. Apart from treating her as a means to satisfying his sexual needs, Lurie uses her much in the same way as the Magistrate uses the barbarian girl, namely to project himself as someone who is loved and admired by other people:

Because he takes pleasure in her, because his pleasure is unfailing, an affection has grown up in him for her. To some degree, he believes, this affection is reciprocated. Affection may not be love, but it is at least its cousin. Given their unpromising beginnings, they have been lucky, the two of them: he to have found her, she to have found him.⁴

Later, when reflecting over his relationship with Soraya, Lurie admits to his self-centered and rather unrealistic view of her: "[h]is sentiments are, he is aware, complacent, even uxorious. Nevertheless he does not cease to hold to them."⁵ His complacency is reinforced by the ease and lack of commitment characterizing his weekly intercourses with Soraya.

However, after intruding into Soraya's private life and learning about her two children,

3 Lucy Graham, "Reading the Unspeakable: Rape in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29, no. 2 (2003): 437.

4 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Disgrace* (1999; London: Vintage, 2000), 2.

5 Ibid.

Lurie displays his sympathetic imagination by showing appreciation of her parental efforts. He admires her individuality and her ability to maintain regular relations with other people. The other time he gets interested in Soraya's private life is when he hires a detective to check if she is in any romantic relationship not related to her work as a prostitute. Judging by his involvement in knowing Soraya, it could be argued that Lurie has become attached to her. On the one hand, his attachment can be interpreted as a symptom of his latent empathy; on the other hand, however, it may confirm his longing for a person over whom he could project his dominant position. It seems that Lurie does suffer remorse for his unsympathetic womanizing, but because of his vanity and self-centeredness, he continuously fails to become more compassionate and respectful of women.

Significantly, Lurie is aware of his shortcomings. When he reflects on his relations with women, he appears to be disgusted with his own callousness. The following citation referring to his affair with Soraya provides an illustrative depiction of Lurie's derogatory self-assessment: “[i]ntercourse between Soraya and himself must be, he imagines, rather like the copulation of snakes: lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest.”⁶ Lurie is aware of his abusive lifestyle, but the insight, although occasionally self-critical, is hardly productive of sympathy.

Lurie's initial failure of sympathy does not mean that he has no potential for sympathetic imagination. The above passage, although unappealing, demonstrates that Lurie is capable of imagining how he is perceived by other people, including his lovers. What he imagines fills him with self-disgust, which he represses by deceiving himself that he is still physically attractive and that women reciprocate his sexual desire. Yet all of this is a smug masquerade, dissimulated with Lurie's misconception of romantic love as oriented toward male sexual fulfillment. Paradoxically, the smugness implicates his

6 Ibid., 3.

imaginative insight into other people's states of mind; it also signals his sense of moral norms. Accordingly, although characterized by vanity and unqualified pride, Lurie evinces a capacity for the sympathetic imagination, not only because he is aware of his limitations, but also through the projected disapproval of his transgressions.

Lurie realizes that his attitude to women is predatory: “[h]er shrillness surprises him: there has been no intimation of it before. But then, what should a predator expect when he intrudes into the vixen’s nest, into the home of her cubs?”⁷ His proclivity for abusing women may be interpreted as a form of emotional sadism, if not also masochism, for he finds his own lovemaking repellent: a “man on a chair snipping away at himself: an ugly sight, but no more ugly, from a certain point of view, than the same man exercising himself on the body of a woman.”⁸ A similar sense of a masochistic self-disgust accompanies his affair with Melanie, the dark-skinned student whom he seduces by intimidating her with his academic authority as a professor. In order to rationalize the seduction, he invents a pseudo-intellectual theory according to which “a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it.”⁹ When Melanie eventually succumbs, mainly because she cannot defy Lurie's obtrusive impositions, he realizes that he is an intruder, indeed a “predator,”¹⁰ in her life. Bringing Melanie home, Lurie is conscious of his transgression:

[...] the girl he has brought home is not just thirty years his junior: she is a student, his student, under his tutelage. No matter what passes between them now, they will have to meet again as teacher and pupil. Is he prepared for that?¹¹

Gradually, he grows aware of Melanie's thoughts and feelings; he also realizes how unattractive he may appear to her. Coetzee hints at Melanie's aversion to Lurie by referring

7 Ibid., 10.

8 Ibid., 9.

9 Ibid., 16.

10 Ibid., 10.

11 Ibid., 12.

to George Grosz (1893-1959), a German American painter known for his emotive depiction of human deformities. Melanie's discomfort is visible in her avoidance of Lurie's embrace. When they make love, she becomes passive and submits herself to him, perhaps not to prolong the intercourse by resisting it. Her unease, evident in the following quote, arouses Lurie's sexual desire: "though she is passive throughout, he finds the act pleasurable, so pleasurable that from its climax he tumbles into blank oblivion."¹² Lurie appears as a callous, self-centered chauvinist who objectifies women to satisfy his own hedonistic pleasure, without paying attention to their feelings.

As already noted, despite his instrumental treatment of his lovers, Lurie experiences doubts and disquieting remorse: "[h]e wills the girl to be captivated too. But he senses she is not."¹³ When he sees Melanie at the lecture, he recalls that he "forced" her clothes off her trembling body, realizing that he persuaded her to have sex by imposing himself on her. Coetzee captures Lurie's moment of sympathy for Melanie: "[he] is sick of the sound of his own voice, and sorry for her too, having to listen to these covert intimacies."¹⁴ The citation indicates that Lurie, like Elizabeth Costello, is not entirely "bankrupt of conscience,"¹⁵ and that some sympathy for the people he abuses is testified by his own self-disgust.

Despite his self-criticism, Lurie cannot quell his sexual craving for Melanie: "*A child!* he thinks: *No more than a child! What am I doing?* Yet his heart lurches with desire."¹⁶ Unable to restrain his lust, David once more forces Melanie to have sex, despite her clear lack of consent. Following the intercourse, Melanie feels confused and frightened; clearly, Lurie has abused his position of trust, forcing her in what might be classified as a rape. Then, in their following lovemaking, Melanie seems uncharacteristically changed:

12 Ibid., 19.

13 Ibid., 15.

14 Ibid., 23.

15 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (2003; London: Vintage, 2004), 204.

16 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 20 (emphasis original).

She is quick, and greedy for experience. If he does not sense in her a fully sexual appetite, that is only because she is young. One moment stands out in recollection, when she hooks a leg behind his buttocks to draw him in closer: as the tendon of her inner thigh tightens against him, he feels a surge of joy and desire.¹⁷

In contrast to their previous intercourse, Melanie is presented as a willing partner. Now evoking the image of prostitute Soraya, it could be argued that Melanie has been corrupted by Lurie. The assumption is bolstered by the fact that on the same day she comes to Lurie's lecture with her boyfriend to intimidate him. Interestingly, instead of asking the boyfriend out of the room, Lurie engages in conversation with him, during which he seems surprisingly self-critical. According to Richard Alan Northover, during the discussion with Melanie's boyfriend, Lurie compares himself to Byron, whom he depicts as a devilish seducer, and also to Lucifer and Cain, thus once more hinting at his capacity for self-criticism and empathy.¹⁸

According to Hilmar Heister, "Lurie is well-aware of his transgression, but lastly justifies it with his over-powering desire. He presents it not as a question of choices, but as if he is compelled to follow through his course of action."¹⁹ Heister also adds that "David Lurie feels sympathy (benevolent pity) for Melanie, and though his desire remains a standing fact, his sympathy seems genuine."²⁰ Admittedly, there are moments that show Lurie's incipient sympathy, although most of them recall self-justifying pangs of conscience: "[t]oday, looking thin and exhausted, she sits huddled over her book. Despite himself, his heart goes out to her. Poor little bird, he thinks, whom I have held against my

17 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 29.

18 Richard Allan Northover, "J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy" (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2009), 238-242, <http://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/24686/Complete.pdf?sequence=7>.

19 Hilmar Heister, "Sympathy and Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee: Empathy and Mirror Neurons in Literature" (PhD diss., Humboldt University of Berlin, 2015), 196, <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/dissertationen/heister-hilmar-2015-03-17/PDF/heister.pdf>.

20 *Ibid.*, 197.

breast!”²¹ It might be argued that Lurie is sympathizing not with his victims but with himself, perversely pitying his dwindling sexual prowess, or faulting himself for losing control over Melanie.²² His feeling of losing control can be inferred from his recurring comparison of Melanie to birds, symbols of independence and freedom. The following passage seems to capture the essence of Lurie's sense of powerlessness: “[p]inch-faced, exhausted, she stands before him. Again his heart goes out to her. If they were alone he would embrace her, try to cheer her up. *My little dove*, he would call her.”²³ With these comparisons to a little dove and children, Lurie is also exposing his enduring patriarchalism.

A noticeable difference occurs at Lurie's last encounter with Melanie; pitying her departure, he begins to speculate over her thoughts, which may symptomize his emerging sympathetic insight:

She stares back at him in puzzlement, even shock. *You have cut me off from everyone*, she seems to want to say. *You have made me bear your secret. I am no longer just a student. How can you speak to me like this?* [...] She raises her chin, meets his eye defiantly. Either she has not understood or she is refusing the opening.²⁴

Lurie seems to acknowledge the limits of his sympathetic insight. After receiving a call from Melanie's father, who is disturbed by her intention to leave the university, Lurie realizes that “Melanie-Meláni, with her baubles from the Oriental Plaza and her blind spot for Wordsworth, takes things to heart. He would not have guessed it. What else has he not guessed about her?”²⁵ According to Kate McInturff, Lurie's emerging imaginative insight into others serves his narcissistic need to affirm his dominance, but considering his passivity before the disciplinary committee, coupled by his readiness to accept the

21 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 32.

22 Cf. Sławomir Masłoń, *Père-Versions of the Truth: The Novels of J. M. Coetzee* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2007), 170-171.

23 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 34 (emphasis original).

24 Ibid. (emphasis original).

25 Ibid., 37.

punishment, it could be argued that he has already renounced his dominance. What he still clings to is pride, vanity, and a sense of elitism.²⁶

Having lost his position at the university, Lurie visits his daughter, Lucy, who runs a small farm in the Eastern Cape. Although they differ from each other, especially in terms of their relations to animals, Lurie seems proud of his offspring: a “solid woman, embedded in her new life. Good! If this is to be what he leaves behind – this daughter, this woman, then he does not have to be ashamed.”²⁷ He might have a low opinion of her lifestyle, calling her a “throwback,” but despite some tension, they appear to be in a cordial relation. Occasionally, they have intimate discussions during which they talk about poetry, human relation to animals, and Lucy's neighbors. All the time, they avoid conflict, which might hint at the reasons why Lucy abandoned Cape Town and settled down far from her family. The cause for their parting might have been a conflict of characters, Lucy being resourceful and independent, her father patronizing and dominant, although it seems more probable that Lucy left home because of her father's compulsive promiscuity. Ignoring the past, however, David and Lucy seem to enjoy each other's company.

Their relationship is disrupted by the attack during which Lucy is raped by three black men, Lurie is beaten and partially burned, and nearly all of Lucy's dogs are killed. According to Heister, “the rape scene itself lends itself to evoke empathy for Lucy and the immediate aftermath puts David's sympathetic imagination and his empathy to the test.”²⁸ Considering his objection to her decision about not reporting the rape to the police and about bearing the baby conceived by one of the perpetrators, it could be argued that Lurie fails the test. Due to his proprietary attitude to Lucy, there is a sense of distance and misunderstanding emerging between them. Two citations seem to capture the extent of the damage their relationship has sustained during the assault: “[i]n his embrace she is stiff as a

26 Kate McInturff, “Rex Oedipus: The Ethics of Sympathy in Recent Work by J. M. Coetzee,” 11.

27 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 33.

28 Heister, “Sympathy and Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee,” 201.

pole, yielding nothing,”²⁹ and: “[n]ever yet have they been so far and so bitterly apart. He is shaken.”³⁰ According to McInturff, the reason for the failure of Lurie's sympathetic imagination is his unrelenting rationalism: “David fails to recognize the extent to which his rational engagement with others in the novel is not sufficient for him to comprehend the experiences, desires, fears, and intentions of others.”³¹

For a few nights after the attack, Lurie suffers from nightmares, imagining that Lucy calls him for help. His sleeplessness might be caused by his feeling of guilt for failing in his fatherly duty to protect his daughter. The following excerpt captures the sense of Lurie's self-oriented remorse:

He has a sense that, inside him, a vital organ has been bruised, abused – perhaps even his heart. For the first time he has a taste of what it will be like to be an old man, tired to the bone, without hopes, without desires, indifferent to the future. Slumped on a plastic chair amid the stench of chicken feathers and rotting apples, he feels his interest in the world draining from him drop by drop.³²

Lurie refers to himself as being in a state of despair. Shocked by the brutality of the attackers, he concentrates more on his own trauma than Lucy's. The preoccupation with his own misery resonates with his tendency to melodrama, vanity and repressed masochism. It also seems to augment his sense of lost control. On a more nuanced reading, Lurie's overreaction could be interpreted as a symptom of repressed self-reproach for his own transgressions, all the more that his patronization of Melanie resembles the rapists' callousness toward Lucy.

What is particularly disturbing about the attack is not so much its racist or historical undertone as the attackers' unwillingness to empathize with their victims. While Lucy is gang-raped in the bedroom, Lurie is forced into a toilet and knocked unconscious. When

29 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 99.

30 Ibid., 112.

31 McInturff, “Rex Oedipus: The Ethics of Sympathy in Recent Work by J. M. Coetzee,” 7.

32 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 107.

he recovers, he looks through the toilet window and sees one of the assailants shoot the dogs in the kennels; the man kills the animals in a casual, yet purposively cruel way, deliberately leaving one wounded dog to die in agony. The calculatedly malicious character of the attackers' brutality is seen in how they take pleasure from the suffering of defenseless creatures which have no means of counterattack or escape. Setting fire to defenseless Lurie, who is locked in the toilet, also seems to be motivated by mere spite. Subsequently, having learned what it means to be dominated by someone who refuses to imagine the victim's feelings, Lurie pities Lucy for her harm, thus testifying to his sympathetic potential.

As already argued, Lurie's sympathetic imagination seems to have been awakened during the affair with Melanie, but it is during the assault that he manages to abandon his egocentrism and fully sympathize with another person. Trapped in the toilet, unable to react, he can only imagine what happens to Lucy; moved by the image, he rages to get out and help her. Coetzee describes the emergence of Lurie's sympathetic imagination toward Lucy in the following way:

His child is in the hands of strangers. In a minute, in an hour, it will be too late; whatever is happening to her will be set in stone, will belong to the past. But now it is not too late. Now he must do something. Though he strains to hear, he can make out no sound from the house. Yet if his child were calling, however mutely, surely he would hear!³³

Lurie tries to comprehend Lucy's torment. Without knowing what is happening to her exactly, he can only imagine it. Judging by his distress, it seems that an imaginative insight into his daughter's suffering helps him understand her better. Imagination improves his sensitivity and, eventually, knowledge of her feelings. In a sense, Lurie confirms Costello's claim from *Slow Man* according to which imagining facts can be more effective than being true to the fact, at least when it comes to stimulating one's moral response.

³³ Ibid., 94.

Visualizing Lucy's torment testifies to Lurie's sympathetic imagination. Not only has he managed to extend his view beyond his private perspective, but he has also initiated his moral transformation. The improvement surfaces in his dealings with animals, and later also in his attitude to other women, especially Bev Shaw.

Lurie's experience during Lucy's rape may be compared to Coetzee's 1992 essay "Into the Dark Chamber" in which Coetzee investigates the writerly ability to imagine events and present them in a believable manner. In Coetzee's view, "the novelist is a person who, camped before a closed door, facing an insufferable ban, creates, in place of the scene he is forbidden to see, a representation of that scene, and a story of the actors in it and how they come to be there."³⁴ It can be argued that Lurie partially emulates such a novelist figure. He imagines Lucy's rape, an event which he has been forbidden to see, and despite merely supposing her torment, what he imagines makes him more sympathetic toward her. His initial reaction may thus be misguided, as his concern for Lucy's safety seems informed by his sense of patriarchal superiority over women, but he is nevertheless stimulated by a genuine care for her safety and wellbeing.

Lurie's emotional reaction to the assault reflects Coetzee's idea of how morally valuable fiction should impel the reader to seek moral improvement. It ought to stimulate empathy, even if the side-effects of the stimulation involve confusion, misunderstanding, and inconsistency. In the spirit of the East Asian dialecticism, Coetzee demonstrates in *Disgrace* that the sympathetic imagination entails a process in which opposites should not be seen as exclusive but as reciprocally supplementary. The sympathetic imagination as presented by Coetzee espouses then the dialectical idea of a harmony of opposites: it counteracts ignorance by appealing to the affective, frequently non-rational part of human morality. It could hence be claimed that Coetzee's idea of the sympathetic imagination

34 John Maxwell Coetzee, "Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State," in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 364.

meets the Kantian requirement of improving people's morality by discouraging the type of self-serving fictions used by Lurie to excuse his abuses of Soraya and Melanie.

Despite the progress, Lurie's sympathetic imagination cannot be deemed complete. He is concerned with Lucy's fate, he tries to understand her pain, but he feels authorized to patronize her and decide about her life regardless of her own opinion. An instance of such subjugation is his demand that she report the attack to the police. The reason for the insistence are Lurie's instilled patriarchal paradigm, according to which men dominate women, and his colonial outlook, in which Lucy is a "currency."³⁵ Elleke Boehmer (b. 1961), a University of Oxford scholar, argues that Lurie's view is representative of the schematic, post-apartheid conception of "the new South African society as a great circulatory system in which goods, which are always scarce, [...] explicitly include women as booty."³⁶ Reflecting Boehmer's thought, Rosemary Jolly, a scholar of Queen's University, Canada, maintains that in *Disgrace* Coetzee exposes that in the Western culture what "is female, corporeal, black, and/or otherwise antirational (and therefore antimale) is allied with that which is animal,"³⁷ hence "[t]he war on women in South Africa occupies the same discursive space as the war on animals in Elizabeth Costello's discourse."³⁸ Embedded in the received structure of white male dominance, Lurie is limited in his sympathetic imagination, therefore, he keeps "misreading"³⁹ Lucy and her silence as repentance for apartheid injustices. However, there is a moment when he abandons his colonial mindset and approaches Lucy's rape without patronizing her. The following excerpt evinces the degree of Lurie's transformation:

35 Christine Sego Caldwell, *Imagining the Other: The Possibilities and Limits of the Sympathetic Imagination in J. M. Coetzee's Recent Fiction* (master's thesis, Indiana University, May 2011), 35, <https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/bitstream/handle/1805/2710/thesis.pdf?sequence=1>.

36 Elleke Boehmer, "Not Saying Sorry, Not Speaking Pain: Gender Implications in *Disgrace*," *Interventions* 4, no. 3 (2002): 346.

37 Rosemary Jolly, "Going to the Dogs: Humanity in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, *The Lives of Animals*, and South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission," in *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, ed. Jane Poyner (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 150.

38 Jolly, "Going to the Dogs," 166.

39 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 112.

‘On the contrary, I understand all too well,’ he says. ‘I will pronounce the word we have avoided hitherto. You were raped. Multiply. By three men.’

‘And?’

‘You were in fear of your life. You were afraid that after you had been used you would be killed. Disposed of. Because you were nothing to them.’⁴⁰

Lucy seems to appreciate her father’s sincerity, and she confirms that he is correct about how she felt during the rape. She admits, “you are right, I meant nothing to them, nothing. I could feel it.”⁴¹ Coetzee shows that common background is not the only basis for the sympathetic imagination; as argued in Chapter III, difference could also engender sympathy. Clearly, at this point, Lucy and her father are antithetical to each other, and yet it seems that it is their disparity that eventually facilitates their reciprocal understanding. One of the differences permitting Lurie’s insight into his daughter, a victim of a rape, could be his own experience of abusing women. Lurie’s moral development emerges in the following dialogue:

There is a long silence between them.

“Do you love him yet?”

Though the words are his, from his mouth, they startle him.

“The child? No, How could I? But I will. Love will grow – one can trust Mother Nature for that. I am determined to be a good mother, David. A good mother and a good person. You should try to be a good person too.”

“I suspect it is too late for me. I’m just an old lag serving out my sentence. But you go ahead. You are well on the way.”

A good person. Not a bad resolution to make, in dark times.⁴²

Lurie used to disregard women’s feelings; toward the end of novel, however, he appears to have abandoned his imposing patriarchalism and become more tolerant of alterity. Enquiring about Lucy’s love for her unborn baby, which is also the first time he asks her about her feelings, he recognizes her right to decide about her body. Instead of patronizing her, he perceives her as his equal, appreciating her stamina and desire to find peace with

40 Ibid., 157.

41 Ibid., 158.

42 Ibid., 216.

the kin of those who have hurt her. Coetzee's depiction of alterity as an opportunity rather than an obstacle to development evokes the dialectical idea of a harmony of opposites, discussed in Chapter III.⁴³

Initially, the principal difference between Lurie and his daughter relates to how they perceive their own selves. Lurie projects himself as a member of the intellectual elite of Cape Town. Entitled to hedonistic pleasures by his sense of patriarchal superiority, he brings to mind the Magistrate from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, a self-complacent patriarch fascinated by Colonel Joll, his adversary and an aspirant to the state elites. Lucy resembles Magda from *In the Heart of the Country*, although she is more independent and familiarized with the land she inhabits. Lurie is a “city boy,”⁴⁴ a consumerist utilitarian leading a hedonistic lifestyle, while Lucy lives in the country where she practices an eco-ethical way of life, including vegetarianism, care for animals, sustainable farming, non-violence, economic independence, and respect for life.

Lurie trivializes Lucy's ideals; he thinks they make it harder for her to survive in the harsh conditions of post-apartheid South Africa. Aware of the utilitarian approach to animals and land among more prosperous farmers, he does not think there is any place for Lucy's autarchic farming. At some point, he is worried that Lucy will sustain more attacks, become destitute, and finally lose her home. Unlike his daughter, Lurie is a pessimist attached to the capitalistic idea of exclusive, self-sufficient rationalism, which objectifies human relations by commodifying them in a profit and loss logic. His instrumental view of the economy permeates his attitude to animals, women, and people of other races.⁴⁵

Accordingly, Lurie opts for a utilitarian paradigm, whereas his daughter seems to practice a form of mild ecofeminism. As Northover claims, Lucy's ecofeminism places

43 Caldwell, *Imagining the Other*, 33-38.

44 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 218.

45 Mike Marais, “The Possibility of Ethical Action: J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 5, no. 1 (June 2000): 56-63, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/18125440008565955>.

emphasis on “the independence of people and its rejection of Kantian autonomy and individualism resemble the African philosophy of ubuntu, which states that a person is a person because of other persons.”⁴⁶ Lucy's farm can be perceived as standing in opposition to industrialized agriculture, defamiliarized by the market-oriented rationality of capitalism and increasing consumption. Lurie thinks of her lifestyle: “[t]his is how she makes a living: from the kennels, and from selling flowers and garden produce. Nothing could be more simple.”⁴⁷

Despite sounding appreciative of her way of life, Lurie stereotypes his daughter, applying to her the pastoral imagery of frontier farmers and first settlers, and failing to appreciate her individuality, her modern outlook, and her involvement in maintaining the ecological sustainability of her land. In the following excerpt, he expresses his surprise at Lucy's alterity: “[d]ogs and a gun; bread in the oven and a crop in the earth. Curious that he [Lurie] and her [Lucy's] mother, cityfolk, intellectuals, should have produced this throwback, this sturdy young settler. But perhaps it was not they who produced her [Lucy]: perhaps history had the larger share.”⁴⁸ The opinion is not dismissive, but it can be deemed as depreciative, and revealing a significant lack of sympathetic identification. Leading the disconnected and abstract life of a city dweller, Lurie downplays Lucy's devotion to the ethics of care for land and nature. There is then an ideological gap between him and his daughter. They differ on the value of animals, racial discrepancies, and the basis of their privilege as whites. Although initially suppressed, the gap widens after Lucy's rape, eventually resulting in Lurie's leaving the farm after Lucy expels him for assaulting Pollux, a juvenile who had accompanied her attackers.

Lurie begins to understand his daughter because of his subsequent demotion from a

46 Northover, “J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy,” 248.

47 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 61.

48 Ibid., 60-61.

“city boy” to what he refers to as a “dog-man; a dog under-taker; a dog psychopomp.”⁴⁹ He becomes similar to Elizabeth Costello whose faithfulness to her ideas is described as “doggedness,”⁵⁰ as well as to Lucy and Bev Shaw, the two characters particularly devoted to tending dogs. Drawing upon the logic of *l'animot*, the linguistic practice of dissimulating animal alterity through generic terms, Coetzee presents the comparison to dogs as humbling, but also as conducive to a broader understanding, tolerance, and altruism. Admittedly, Lucy is surprisingly nonjudgmental about her father's love affairs; unlike the women on the university committee, she refrains from a hasty condemnation of him, thus displaying substantial sympathy for him. Occasionally, she has recourse to light sarcasm when she mentions his excuses for abusing his lovers, but her comments are balanced and always considerate. Apparently, she avoids pointed criticism out of concern for her father's feelings and his trauma at being expelled from the university in disgrace.

On a more general level, the sole fact that Lucy hosts Lurie and lets him stay in her house as long as he likes can be perceived as a significant confirmation of her tolerance and empathy toward other people. It could be argued that the reason why Lucy left Cape Town, abandoning her family house, may have been her father's pedophile tendencies. On numerous occasions, Lurie refers to Melanie, his student lover, as a child, and to himself as her father. He seems sexually attracted by her narrow, girlish hips and small breasts. His attraction to girlie women is confirmed by his ex-wife Rosalind who claims that Melanie is his type because she has a “cunning little weasel body.”⁵¹ Coetzee implies Lurie's pedophile bent not only by the childlike appearance of his lovers, but also by the fact that the place where he makes love to them is Lucy's child room. As the following quote demonstrates, Lurie finds it sexually arousing to seduce Melanie in Lucy's former bed:

49 Ibid., 146.

50 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 4.

51 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 189.

He sits down on the bed, draws her to him. In his arms she begins to sob miserably. Despite all, he feels a tingling of desire. 'There, there,' he whispers, trying to comfort her. 'Tell me what is wrong.' Almost he says, 'Tell Daddy what is wrong.'⁵²

In Northover's view, "the reference to 'Daddy' not only indicates the patriarchal power that Lurie has abused but also suggests an incestuous paedophilia,"⁵³ A similar suggestion is made by Coetzee when Lurie meets Melanie's sixteen-year-old sister, Desiree:

He watches her closely [and] thinks: fruit of the same tree, down probably to the most intimate detail. Yet with differences: different pulsings of the blood, different urgencies of passion. The two of them in the same bed: an experience fit for a king. He shivers lightly.⁵⁴

In this context, it is disturbing that, after the attack, Lurie agrees to sleep in the room where Lucy was raped. Equally disquieting is his regret at Lucy's diminishing attractiveness caused by her increased weight and lesbianism. Given the above evidence, Lucy's sexual orientation could be deemed to result from an aversion to men conditioned by her father's possible abuse in her childhood. For additional evidence of Lurie's abuse of children, his verbal and physical violence to Pollux could be recalled.

It could be mentioned that Lucy's friendly relations with the Shaws, a pair of animal lovers considered strange by most people, is another factor confirming her openness to alterity and different views. Yet it is her relation to animals that reveals her sympathetic imagination in full strength. She personalizes the dogs in her care by referring to them with such pronouns as "he," "who," and "she." She humanizes them by inferring their emotions; responding to Lurie's claim that Katy is difficult to befriend, Lucy says that the bitch is "sulking"⁵⁵ over being abandoned by her former owners. Lucy's sympathetic insight into Katy can be exemplified with the following quote:

⁵² Ibid., 26.

⁵³ Northover, "J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy," 236.

⁵⁴ Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 164.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 62.

Poor old Katy, she's in mourning. No one wants her, and she knows it. The irony is, she must have offspring all over the district who would be happy to share their homes with her. But it's not in their power to invite her.⁵⁶

For Lucy, animals are family, and she appears to mourn their loss more than her own harm. Lurie does not respect animals as much as his daughter does, although at the end of *Disgrace* he manages to increase his sensitivity to animal suffering, especially to that of unwanted dogs.

Despite the discrepancies, Lucy respects her father and avoids criticizing his self-oriented hedonistic lifestyle. Her sympathy outweighs her resentment and her personal trauma. The proof for Lucy's empathy is not only her considerate view of animals and of Lurie, but also her decision to give birth to the baby conceived during the rape. Having already had an abortion in the past, she does not decide to abort her child again solely "because of who its father is."⁵⁷ Unlike Lurie, who might have abused her as a child, Lucy does not want to repeat his mistakes; instead, she chooses to respect the child's alterity, hoping to "re-shape something good from evil, transform a child conceived in violence and hatred into a symbol of hope and renewal for the future."⁵⁸ Her concern for the unborn baby seems based on the same principle as her care for unwanted animals, namely to respect the most vulnerable, weakest and innocent members of society, those unable to defend themselves against mistreatment or to complain about their harm.

In Kantian ethics, respect for such beings is not only an indication but also a requirement of moral character. To achieve the Kantian ideal, Lurie will have to relinquish the egoistic ethics of his utilitarian rationalism. This he will be reduced to the state of a dog, or he will sympathetically imagine that state and, like the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, he will personally experience what it means to be in a position of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 78.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 198.

⁵⁸ Northover, "J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy," 299.

powerlessness and unearned suffering. Through the rape, Lucy has already achieved that position; her decision to keep the baby means that she has also come to terms with her own predicament, from which she claims to begin anew “like a dog.” It seems as if in *Disgrace* Coetzee were advocating the idea of a fresh start, “with no cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity,”⁵⁹ a view that Lurie struggles to understand due to his rationalistic mindset.⁶⁰

Elizabeth Lowry, an editor and literary critic of the *London Review of Books*, claims that *Disgrace* is “a deeply pessimistic book,”⁶¹ and considering the price Lucy pays for living in post-apartheid South Africa, the pessimism seems justified, mainly because it is unlikely that many of the former beneficiaries of apartheid would be ready to emulate her ethics of self-abasement. Coetzee's belief in the sympathetic imagination as the way for reconciling after apartheid appears not only exaggerated but also uncharacteristically naive. Lowry's view is shared by Sam Durrant, a Leeds University scholar, who opts for a limited sympathetic imagination, in contrast to Elizabeth Costello's claim that there are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination. Yet a mere recognition of one's limitations can already be considered an extension of one's sympathetic imagination. Limits are defied first by learning about them. Lurie's story is positive in the sense that throughout his struggle he eventually comes to realize his flaws, including his sexist prejudice against women:

He has not taken to Bev Shaw, a dumpy, bustling little woman with black freckles, close-cropped, wiry hair, and no neck. He does not like women who make no effort to be attractive. It is a resistance he has had to Lucy's friends before. Nothing to be proud of: a prejudice that has settled in his mind, settled down. His mind has become a refuge for old thoughts, idle, indigent, with nowhere else to go. He ought to chase them out, sweep the premises clean. But he

⁵⁹ Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 205.

⁶⁰ Sam Durrant, “J. M. Coetzee, Elizabeth Costello, and the Limits of the Sympathetic Imagination,” in Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, 127.

⁶¹ Elisabeth Lowry, “Like a Dog,” *London Review of Books* 20, no. 20 (October 14, 1999): 14, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n20/elizabeth-lowry/like-a-dog>.

does not care to do so, or does not care enough.⁶²

Although Lurie does not entirely succeed in overcoming his limitations, he nonetheless manages to make the first steps toward ethical improvement, discernible in his eventual acceptance of Lucy's decisions, his rejection of racism and misogyny, and his hopes about grandfatherhood. The improvement is started by his exposure to animals, especially the two Persian sheep slaughtered by Petrus and the ill ram at Bev's clinic. An exposure to animals as the source of Lurie's ethical progress corresponds to the Kantian idea that an ethical treatment of animals may be conducive to an improvement of one's humanity.

The progress of Lurie's sympathetic imagination is epitomized by his awkward, though sincere, attempts to console Lucy, by his humiliating apology before the Isaacs, by the fact that he volunteers to cook meat for the dogs to relieve Lucy, and by downscaling his opera. The opera, originally intended as a multipart masterpiece on Byron's last love affair in Italy, gradually changes into a mere monologue by Byron's mourning lover, Teresa Guiccioli. Mirroring Lurie's change, its focus passes from male promiscuity to female abandonment, from an instrumental exploitation to a sympathetic identification, until it eventually reaches a point at which it reflects Lurie's own reduction to the state of a dog. Lurie refers to the new form of his opera in the following way:

Byron, in the new version, is long dead; Teresa's sole remaining claim to immortality, and the solace of her lonely nights, is the chestful of letters and memorabilia she keeps under her bed, what she calls her *reliqui*, which her grand-nieces are meant to open after her death and peruse with awe.⁶³

The new Teresa, described as “a dumpy little widow [w]ith her heavy bust, her stocky trunk, her abbreviated legs, [looking] more like a peasant,”⁶⁴ does not remind us of Lurie's young lovers, Soraya or Melanie, but rather of Bev Shaw, whom he finds unattractive due

⁶² Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 72.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

to her excess weight, poor complexion and dog smell. Suspecting the eventual failure of the opera, Lurie sympathizes with Teresa:

Poor Teresa? Poor aching girl! He has brought her back from the grave, promised her another life, and now he is failing her. He hopes she will find it in her heart to forgive him.⁶⁵

The passage confirms not only Lurie's adoption of Teresa's point of view, but also his developing sympathetic imagination. The development is not complete: he still lusts after Melanie's teenage sister, Desiree, he beats Pollux upon catching him peeping in Lucy's bathroom, and he regards Petrus's offer of protection in return for Lucy's land as opportunistic blackmail.⁶⁶

The limits of Lurie's sympathetic imagination are also indicated by his failure at imagining himself in Lucy's position. At some point, he admits that "he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself,"⁶⁷ but he cannot imagine himself into the being of raped Lucy. Mike Marais juxtaposes the above confession with a passage which seems to confirm Lurie's sympathetic identification with his daughter:

Lucy was frightened, frightened near to death. Her voice choked, she could not breathe, her limbs went numb. *This is not happening*, she said to herself as the men forced her down; *it is a dream, a nightmare*.⁶⁸

The juxtaposition testifies to the incompleteness of Lurie's ethical transformation. Marais's criticism notwithstanding, the juxtaposition could still be perceived as Lurie's realization of his limits, thus not as a failure of the sympathetic imagination but as its success, modest,

65 Ibid., 214.

66 See Northover, "J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy," 292-293, 304.

67 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 160.

68 Ibid. (emphasis original).

yet indicative of his ethical improvement.⁶⁹

The sympathetic imagination does not render reality truthfully, nor does it engender any factual knowledge, but it enables Lurie to reconsider his worldview and strive for moral betterment. A symptom of such a reconsideration is the change in his ethical assessment of his role model, Byron. Lurie praises the poet; he even tries to write an opera about him, concentrating on his love life, but after the talk with Lucy, he admits that “among the legions of countesses and kitchen maids Byron pushed himself into there were no doubt those who called it rape.”⁷⁰ From a one-dimensional admirer, Lurie’s perspective on Byron eventually broadens, becoming more nuanced and critical, especially with reference to the poet’s treatment of women. He acknowledges that Byron may have used his dominant position to seduce and abuse women. Since Lurie tries to emulate Byron, frequently comparing himself to him, it could be claimed that by criticizing the poet, he indirectly admits to his own shortcomings. The decision to move the plot of the opera to the time when Byron is dead can be viewed as the culmination of Lurie’s self-criticism. However, the death of the Byron figure does not necessarily evince Lurie’s sympathetic imagination; it means the renunciation of his possessive view of women. In the context of the opera, only by adopting Teresa’s point of view can Lurie’s sympathetic insight be asserted as genuine. The insight takes the form of Teresa’s monologue as imagined and rendered by Lurie in the concluding chapters of *Disgrace*.

Lucy recognizes Lurie’s change, yet despite his developing sympathy, she still seems skeptical whether he will be sympathetic enough to accept her decision to keep her pregnancy and marry her neighbor Petrus, a supposed relative of one of the rapists. Coetzee stresses Lucy’s doubt by asking whether Lurie does “have it in him to be the

69 Mike Marais, “J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and the Task of the Imagination,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 29, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 76,
<http://www.helsinki.fi/filosofi/oppimateriaali/Hamalainen/Marais.pdf>.

70 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 160.

woman?”⁷¹ Lurie's failure to understand her point of view, evident in his continual demands that she should undergo an abortion and press charges against Petrus, proves that he cannot answer her question positively. Despite his attempts, the gender boundary seems impassable for Lurie. He realizes the difficulty in the final stages of the work on his opera, which he eventually abandons, disappointed with his rendition of Teresa's thoughts. The resignation could be interpreted as his way of acknowledging his failure at the sympathetic imagination. However, as already discussed, recognition of limits can be treated as the first stage on one's way toward surpassing them. The beginning of such a way is for Lurie the moment Lucy invites him for tea after being expelled from her house. Accepting his status as a mere visitor, Lurie starts literally with nothing; he has no job, his house has been ransacked, his reputation is ruined. In a sense, he is without family because it is not certain whether Lucy is going to allow him to stay over, and soon he will euthanize Driepoot, the dog he loves. However, this is the moment when Lurie is closest to Lucy; they both are in a reduced state, helpless, occupying a position of powerlessness at the bedrock of being, like an unwanted dog. Yet despite their predicament, it is at this point that Lurie and his daughter are able to sympathize with one another, imaginatively visiting each other's hearts, deemed by Costello to be the most important cognitive faculty, relying on the idea that “visitation [is] a new footing, a new start.”⁷²

The question whether Lurie can be “the woman” involves more than his overcoming sexism, racism or a patriarchal worldview. Lucy Graham argues that the question “suggests that ethical responsiveness depends on experiencing the narrative differently – not from the viewpoint of perpetrator or voyeur, but from the position of weakness and suffering.”⁷³ Considering the concluding part of *Disgrace*, in which Lurie stops pressuring Lucy and accepts her unborn child, it could be argued that he does eventually manage to

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 218.

73 Graham, “Unspeakable,” 444.

inhabit the position of the less privileged. However, the change does not occur as a result of his dealings with women, nor does it stem from his involvement in the opera, but from his exposure to animals, their suffering and death.

6.2. Coetzee's Animal Ethics

At the beginning of the novel, Lurie refers to animals in a language which Tom Herron, a Leeds Metropolitan University scholar, defines as “redolent of the seminar rooms he [Lurie] has just vacated,”⁷⁴ that is, based on the instrumentalist view of animals as a means to human ends. Lurie argues that people “are of a different order of creation from the animals,”⁷⁵ and that kindness to them “should be out of simple generosity, and not because we feel guilty or fear retribution.”⁷⁶ He also maintains that animals do not require as much respect and attention as people due to animals' lack of souls.

Lurie is not concerned with animals; they exist to him as abstract beings, which mark their presence by supplying his language with such figures of speech as “bull's eye” and “dogged silence.” He appears to observe the speciesist prejudice of *l'animot*, designating animals as necessarily inferior to people, paradoxically a view advocated by numerous proponents of animal ethics, among others Peter Singer.⁷⁷ As already noted, Lurie uses animals as a surface for projecting and dissimulating his worries about his diminishing attractiveness to women and his deteriorating sexual prowess. In *Disgrace*, at least in its initial chapters, animals can thus be perceived as abstract objects of human thought, never fully independent of the anthropocentric paradigm. Occasionally, Coetzee employs animal

74 Tom Herron, “The Dog Man: Becoming an Animal in Coetzee's *Disgrace*,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 51, no. 4 (2005): 478, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20058782>.

75 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 74.

76 Ibid.

77 See Peter Singer, “Reflections,” in John Maxwell Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 90.

imagery for exposing the pathologies developing in tertiary education, especially among abusive academic scholars:

We put our children in the hands of you people because we think we can trust you. If we can't trust the university, who can we trust? We never thought we were sending our daughter into a nest of vipers.⁷⁸

The abstract category of animals is also projected onto black people in order to imply their inferiority in relation to whites. The perpetrators who attacked and raped Lucy are frequently depicted in animalistic terms; most often they are referred to as dogs. Apart from black people, animal imagery is used in reference to women. Lurie calls Soraya a vixen watching her cubs; he refers to Melanie as a rabbit. He also disrespects people who are concerned with animal welfare, among them Bev Shaw. When he first meets her, he is appalled by the signs of animal presence in her house: "cat urine [,] dog mange [,] birds in cages, cats everywhere underfoot."⁷⁹ His disdain for the Shaws and other people like them is demonstrated in his mockery of their values:

I'm sorry, my child, I just find it hard to whip up an interest in the subject. It's admirable, what you do, what she does, but to me animal-welfare people are a bit like Christians of a certain kind. Everyone is so cheerful and well-intentioned that after a while you itch to go off and do some raping and pillaging. Or to kick a cat.⁸⁰

For Lurie, animals are second-class beings; he is hardly interested in their lives, and if he refers to them, he usually does it indirectly through a metaphor or idiom.⁸¹

As Herron argues, apart from degrading others, Lurie employs animal imagery also to project his supremacy. His main resource is the language of predation, hunting and parasitism. He compares himself to a hunting fox, a prowling wolf, a hunted beast, a worm

⁷⁸ Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 38.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁸¹ Herron, "The Dog Man: Becoming an Animal in Coetzee's *Disgrace*," 475-476.

feeding on an apple or a sneaking viper. He also compares himself to a shark: “[w]hat does she see, when she looks at him, that keeps her at such a pitch of anger? A shark among the helpless little fishies?”⁸² Moreover, considering that Lurie’s attitude to animals is strictly anthropocentric and academically abstracted, “characteristics of thought and verbal performance that within a short space of time David will be forced to abandon,”⁸³ it is possible to demonstrate his elitism by investigating his apartheid-informed classification of dog breeds and his projection of their classification onto women and black people.

Coetzee’s involvement with dogs in *Disgrace*, a novel depicting relations in post-apartheid South Africa, can be explained in terms of the socio-political meaning of dog breeds in that country. According to Lance Van Sittert and Sandra Swart, authors of an insightful study of the dog imagery in South Africa, “*Canis Familiaris: A Dog History of Southern Africa*” (2003), during apartheid, the local ruling class projected its fear of interracial mixing onto dogs. Pure-bred dogs, among them the German Shepherd, Doberman, Rottweiler and Bull Terrier, were associated with the upper class, white rulers, and British elitism. Mongrels, on the other hand, were considered underclass dogs, therefore, they were associated with black and Coloured people. Such a classification of dogs reflected “Victorian typological thinking of race, quality, purity, and progress,”⁸⁴ and it corresponded to the stratification of the South African society in the times of apartheid. A growing fear of the black majority was thus accompanied by an increasing disdain for mongrels, and an equally marked preference for guard dogs, especially the German Shepherd. Herron associates the popularity of fierce breeds with the white desire to retain dominance; he perceives it as “part of an apparatus of deterrence (including electrified fences and guns),”⁸⁵ aimed at intimidating the black majority. Consequently, as Van Sittert

82 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 53.

83 Herron, “The Dog Man: Becoming an Animal in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” 476.

84 Lance Van Sittert and Sandra Swart, “*Canis Familiaris: A Dog History of Southern Africa*,” *South African Historical Journal* 48, no. 1 (2003): 145, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02582470308671929>.

85 Herron, “The Dog Man: Becoming an Animal in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” 472.

and Swart argue, “the dog became an easy metaphor for apartheid,”⁸⁶ and Coetzee seems to draw upon the metaphor in *Disgrace*.

Substantial references to the South African canine symbolism are present mainly at the beginning of the novel, and they seem to fade along with Lurie’s increasing engagement with animals, although they never disappear entirely. It is particularly disturbing that one of the principal kernels of the canine symbolism is Lucy’s farm, a place appearing for most of the plot as a site of animal refuge and human-animal reconciliation. When Lurie looks at Lucy’s kennels, he spots “Dobermans, German Shepherds, Ridgebacks, Rottweilers.”⁸⁷ Lucy explains to him that she keeps the dogs for protection; she claims that in South Africa “[d]ogs still mean something.”⁸⁸ As it turns out, Lucy shares the apartheid-informed perception of dogs, although it is not certain whether she also believes in its racist corollary and, like her father, whether she associates blacks with mongrels. She is certainly aware of the dog imagery, as are her rapists who seem to shoot her purebreds because of their association with whites. The killing is a symbolic gesture exposing the weakness of the white minority; it also shows that white people cannot feel secure any longer because dogs have ceased to be a reliable deterrent.

Another reference to the canine symbolism is Lurie’s attachment to Katy, a Bulldog bitch that miraculously survives the attack. Lurie’s devotion to the values which the dog stands for is illustrated by the fact that one evening he falls asleep in her cage. On the one hand, spending a whole night outdoors, a few days after the attack, might be interpreted as recklessness. On the other hand, however, his comfort with Katy may indicate his attachment to the values pedigree dogs stand for in the South African canine imagery. Also, the bond with the dog reflects Lurie’s sense of superiority. Katy is a Bulldog, a breed considered the most British. By turning to her, Lurie displays an attachment to the elitism

86 Van Sittert and Swart, “*Canis Familiaris: A Dog History of Southern Africa*,” 165.

87 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 61.

88 Ibid., 60.

associated with Britishness. He is an anglophile, which is also discernible in the object of his study: British literature. Lurie does not subscribe to Afrikaner nationalism; however, due to his favoring British culture, he can still be considered an inheritor of imperialism as well as of the associated colonial prejudice against non-whites.

Lurie's partiality for Britishness may explain his patronizing of Lucy, especially after the rape. While he projects his rape of Melanie as resulting from the influence of Eros, thus as a divine form of praise for female beauty, he takes the rape of his daughter to be an act of animalistic lust and of avenging apartheid through sexual violence. As he puts it, "they were not raping, they were mating,"⁸⁹ expressing the white fear of black sexual rage, theorized by Frantz Fanon as the white dread of "the Negro [...] sexual instinct (in its raw form) [,] a terrifying penis."⁹⁰ In Lurie's view, the rape of Lucy is "meant to soil her, to mark her, like a dog's urine,"⁹¹ to disgrace her in the eyes of white people. Admittedly, the rapists are successful; Lucy refuses to report the rape for fear of being socially stigmatized by her sexual intimacy with blacks. She expresses her sense of intimidation as follows: "I think I am in their territory. They have marked me. They will come back for me."⁹² Yet for Lurie her failure to report the rape could mean a betrayal of the values which are constitutive of his lifestyle and which his daughter, as a white woman, stands for in South Africa.

Lurie's abuse of Melanie and his stalking of Soraya could also be perceived as sexual violence aimed at their intimidation and subduing. He justifies himself by claiming that his "case rests on the rights of desire,"⁹³ unlike the rapists' atavistic, dog-like drive to mate. Coetzee presents Lurie's excuses as follows:

89 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 199.

90 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (1952; London: Pluto Press, 2008), 177

91 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 199.

92 *Ibid.*, 158.

93 *Ibid.*, 89.

*I was a servant of Eros: that is what he wants to say, but does he have the effrontery? It was a god who acted through me. What vanity! Yet not a lie, not entirely. In the whole wretched business there was something generous that was doing its best to flower. If only he had known the time would be so short!*⁹⁴

It could be argued that Lurie's insistence on the racial character of the assault at Lucy's farm reinforces the above-discussed link between his predatory assaults on Soraya and Melanie and his animalistic perception of Lucy's rapists.

David Lurie is afraid that the vengeful blacks might interpret Lucy's passivity as a sign of her fear, and an encouragement for further violence. Unable to persuade her to report the rape, he still urges her to get rid of all the visible signs of the attack, including the unborn. As already noted, she rejects his advice, arguing that she will not harm an innocent being. Consequently, having his parental authority undermined, Lurie feels confused and discarded. Clearly, it is out of loneliness and out of an increasing sense of alienation that he becomes attached to Katy, a living symbol of the passing imperial paradigm and of the privileged status of the whites. He grows fond of her because she represents the qualities which his daughter has abandoned, and which he still holds dear. One such quality is British elitism.

It is interesting to re-examine Lurie's first encounter with Katy. As he notices, the bitch has problems defecating, and when she relieves herself she is "glancing around shiftily as if ashamed to be watched."⁹⁵ Since it is unknown if dogs are capable of human emotions, it could be argued that Lurie projects on her his own shame. Although he refused to repent before the university committee, displaying his wronged male pride, he still might feel subconsciously guilty for his transgressions. In this regard, the projection of his shame on Katy could be Coetzee's way of showing that Lurie has a potential for disinterested sympathy, if not for people then at least for animals. However, such a

94 Ibid. (emphasis original).

95 Ibid., 68.

benevolent interpretation is complicated by Katy's biological sex; she is female, so Lurie's vision of her shame could be perceived as his reproach for the female failure to honor what he calls women's duty to share their beauty. In this sense, Lurie's first impression of Katy might be a result of his patriarchal and sexist prejudices. A link between the two interpretations is provided by the ensuing events: Katy's perceived shame may foreshadow Lurie's self-reproof for his inability to help his violated daughter as well as Lucy's own disgrace for having been treated "like a dog."⁹⁶ The fact that Lurie may be compensating for the increasing distance between himself and his daughter by becoming more attached to the dog seems to provide additional confirmation for the implied correspondence between Lucy and Katy.

According to Rosemary Jolly, the argument for animal ethics in *Disgrace* is developed in reference to the patriarchal disregard of women, and it is evinced through Coetzee's recurring comparisons of femininity to animality. Interestingly, her claim that whatever "is female, corporeal, black, and/or otherwise antirational (and therefore antimale) is allied with that which is animal"⁹⁷ resonates with Donna Haraway's critique of the cultural binaries, among others the nature-culture binary, discussed in Chapter V of the present dissertation. In Haraway's view, overcoming the male prejudice against women may not only stimulate an elimination of the human bias against animals, but it might also itself be reinforced by the recognition of animal rights. It could be argued that Coetzee's idea of moral improvement through exposure to animals as well as his recurring comparisons of women to animals conform with Haraway's theory.⁹⁸

Lucy's first words to the dogs killed during the assault, "[m]y darlings, my darlings,"⁹⁹ are echoed by Lurie: "[m]y dearest, my dearest."¹⁰⁰ It can be claimed that the alliterative

96 Ibid., 205.

97 Jolly, "Going to the Dogs," 150.

98 Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association, 1991), 150.

99 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 97.

100 Ibid., 98.

sound combination of his words in relation to Lucy's implies a link between the human mistreatment of animals with the male violence against women. A similar combination, although referring to the rhythm of the wording, is to be found in Lurie's above cited spiteful opinion about Bev Shaw's enthusiasm for helping mistreated animals: "[e]veryone is so cheerful and well-intentioned that after a while you itch to go off and do some raping and pillaging. Or to kick a cat."¹⁰¹ His endorsement of casual violence against animals, "to kick a cat," can be perceived as corresponding with "raping," the type of violence most frequently done to women. The other examples of Coetzee's implied correlation between the abuse of women and the abuse of animals involve his frequent comparisons of sexual intercourse to hunting, nesting, and mating. It can be argued that the purpose of the correlation is to demonstrate that the maltreatment of animals has the same source as the abuse of women, namely a culture of violence based on an unqualified use of utilitarian rationalism, detectable in the instrumentalization of the less privileged, including women, the poor, and animals.¹⁰²

Coetzee bases the woman-animal correlation on the speciesist rationalism of *l'animot*, that is, the linguistic subsumption of entire groups of animals, particularly dogs, under the South African idea of mongrel-like destitution. Coetzee tests the logic of *l'animot* by designating it as the basis of Lurie's individual approach to Katy. Upon seeing the dog for the first time, Lurie pauses to ask a rhetorical question: "[a]bandoned, are we?,"¹⁰³ recognizing that they are both lonely. It can be argued that Lurie's sleeping in Katy's kennel is an act of sympathy, a way of keeping company with a creature that has recently lost all her canine company. The sleeping can also be interpreted as his ability to reciprocate; sympathizing with the dog, he knows that Katy is lonely and, in a gesture of

101 Ibid., 73.

102 Northover, "J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy," 213-214, 289, 297; cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (1981; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 117.

103 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 78.

solidarity, he decides to seclude himself by spending the night away from his own bed. Accordingly, despite a speciesist basis for their bond, or rather because of it, it seems that the first symptoms of Lurie's emerging sympathetic imagination are displayed toward Katy, signifying the beginning of his moral transformation.

The above interpretation is problematized by Lurie's contemptuous treatment of the dogs killed during the assault. He buries them only when asked to do so by his traumatized daughter. During the burial, he does not think about the harm done to the dogs, instead he imagines the joy the attackers felt at killing them:

He trundles the corpses over in a wheelbarrow. The dog with the hole in its throat still bares its bloody teeth. Like shooting fish in a barrel, he thinks. Contemptible, yet exhilarating, probably, in a country where dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man. A satisfying afternoon's work, heady, like all revenge.¹⁰⁴

Heister maintains that Lurie's "sympathetic imagination turns to the cruelty of the perpetrators and leaves aside the suffering of the dogs."¹⁰⁵ Lurie's insight into the attackers' state of mind at killing the dogs corresponds to his confession that he is able to imagine what they felt while raping Lucy. The juxtaposition of the dog slaughter and the rape confirms Lurie's association of women with dogs. His perverse attraction to the assaulter, rather than to the victim of the assault mirrors the Magistrate's use of the barbarian girl to get insight into her torturer, Joll. It also illustrates what Elizabeth Costello warns against in "Evil," namely that violence may seem more attractive than benevolence and sympathy, especially for those who seek immoral pleasures, trusting that their all-encompassing rationality will save them from harm. As noted earlier, David Lurie can be perceived as an epitome of such unqualified rationalism.

Lurie's lack of sympathy for the massacred dogs is accompanied by his incomprehension for the Shaws' care for the unwanted animals. When Bev tells him that

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 110.

¹⁰⁵ Heister, "Sympathy and Imagination in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee," 206.

animals appear to like him, that he is “a good presence”¹⁰⁶ for them, he trivializes her words, making ironic comments about his liking animals as food. The other indication of Lurie's arrogant speciesism is his use of the pronoun “we” when referring to Katy's abandonment. He might be using the pronoun in its royal inflection, denoting his proneness to Britishness, of which monarchy, the Royal Family, and a specific type of upper-class language are important signifiers. Therefore, his “we” could be a way of marking his dominance over the dog. Yet, considering its context, the pronoun should rather be interpreted as an act of identification, if not humility, as it reduces him to the status of an animal. The next quote evinces his sympathetic insight into the dog's perspective: “[a] shadow of grief falls over him: for Katy, alone in her cage, for himself, for everyone.”¹⁰⁷ Lurie's emerging sympathetic imagination is subsequently extended to other dogs, Bev Shaw's animals, dead dogs, and later onto people.¹⁰⁸

While the purebreds owned by Lucy represent white elitism, the mongrels roaming around the neighborhood stand for the black majority. Lurie comes in close contact with them at Bev Shaw's clinic. Initially he perceives these dogs as “a mob of scrawny mongrels,”¹⁰⁹ and since they have “no classes,”¹¹⁰ they remind him of the begging children he has seen before the clinic. For Lurie, breed reflects racial inequalities; he links the misery of mongrels with the underprivileged position of South African blacks. The association is also visible when he draws a parallel between the dogs' high fertility rate and the relatively large population of non-whites in South Africa. The parallel is ethically problematic not only because it animalizes black people, but also due to Lurie's reasons for helping to euthanize the unwanted dogs. Considering the apartheid dog imagery, it could

106 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 81.

107 Ibid., 79.

108 Cf. Derek Attridge, “Age of Bronze, State of Grace: Music and Dogs in Coetzee's *Disgrace*,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 34 (2001): 107, <http://www.helsinki.fi/filosofi/oppimateriaali/Hamalainen/Attridge.pdf>.

109 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 84.

110 Ibid., 85.

be claimed that by euthanizing surplus mongrels, Lurie is symbolically retaliating against their symbolic referent, that is, native Africans. Forbidden by his daughter to press charges against the black attackers, Lurie takes vengeance in the symbolic order, requiting his harm on mongrels as representative of the rapists. One more factor confirming the vengeance hypothesis concerns Lurie's insistence on burning the dog corpses. It could be argued that he burns the canine counterparts of the rapists in order to take symbolic revenge for the burns he himself sustained during the attack. The allusion to black people is intensified by the black body bags in which the dead dogs are fed into the incinerator.

The idea that Lurie burns dead dogs to symbolically avenge the attack is put into question by his claim that the dogs are killed solely because of their excessive fecundity. He uses the following quote from Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, "*because we are too menny*,"¹¹¹ which is a line from the suicide note left by Jude's illegitimate son, called "Little Father Time." Before hanging himself, the boy also kills his two half-sisters. He thinks that they are a burden to their parents who must struggle to provide for their children. By committing the murder, Jude's son hopes to relieve his parents of that burden. Accordingly, the note refers to the boy's sense of worthlessness, awoken and perpetuated in him by the objectifying capitalism of nineteenth-century England. The fact that he projects the feeling on his siblings could be interpreted as an expression both of his self-centeredness and his limited insight into the perspective of other people, a set of shortcomings demonstrated by Lurie in the first half of *Disgrace*. It might be noteworthy at this point that Jude's son is socially troubled, one of the reasons for his difficulties being his limited understanding of other people's feelings and their motivations.

In a similar sense, the dogs at Bev's clinic are euthanized because of their numbers. People leave them in Bev's care because they cannot provide for them. The dogs are disposed of also because they are no longer useful to their owners, despite being in most

111 Ibid., 146 (emphasis original).

cases healthy and without any wounds. Not ready to kill the animals themselves, the owners delegate the task to Bev. Like Jude's children, and Lurie's former lovers, Soraya and Melanie, the discarded animals are victims of the utilitarian paradigm, according to which one's worth is determined by one's usability, or what Jolly refers to as the "economies of instrumentalism."¹¹² In this context, the usage of the German word *Lösung*, which refers to the Nazi plan of genocide of the Jews, depicted by Hitler's propaganda as useless and harmful to the society, could be perceived as Coetzee's way of bringing to mind the moral unacceptability of the rationalizations used by people to dissimulate their abuse of animals.

It also brings to mind Tom Regan's objection to the utilitarian approach to animal ethics, propagated among others by his former intellectual ally Peter Singer. As argued in Chapter II, Regan's rights-based approach to animals, also described as deontological animal ethics, does not base the ethical value of animals on their shared characteristics, but solely on the fact that each of them has an individual life. Regan defines the subject-of-a-life criterion as necessarily inducing moral consideration. Drawing upon Kant's deontological ethics, Regan claims that people have duties to animals because of their being subjects of life, and that morality depends on observing these duties. Exposing the depersonalized character of the "economies of instrumentalism," Coetzee observes the Kantian rights-based, non-utilitarian, and duty oriented ethics.¹¹³

The term *Lösung* is problematic as it echos Elizabeth Costello's controversial parallel between the industrialized slaughter of animals and the Holocaust. As discussed in Chapter IV, the purpose of the parallel in *The Lives of Animals* is not to equate the victims of German Nazism with animals, but to compare the ignorance of the passive witnesses of the Holocaust with people's blindness to the atrocities of the abattoir. In *Disgrace*, however,

112 Jolly, "Going to the Dogs," 167.

113 Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 205-206.

especially due to the mention of *Lösung*, Coetzee seems to concentrate specifically on the Holocaust, particularly on its methodology. He argues that the principle underlying Nazi death camps, places designed for making killing as efficient as possible, hidden from human sight, and dissimulated as providing benefit to the society in the form of labor, can also be identified as underlying the abattoir, fur farms, and factory farming.

Concerned with the fact that the Holocaust and the industrialized slaughter of animals are based on the same principle of efficiency, Costello argues that meat-eating evinces and stimulates the type of culturally dissimulated violence that, apart from making the suffering of animals possible, allows for the abusive treatment of women and people of different social and ethnic standing. In her view, meat-eating represents a fall of humanity, which she compares with the “state of sin”¹¹⁴ reached by those who committed the crimes of the Nazis. Her designation of human nature as sinful might shed some light on her GOD-DOG anagram from “At the Gate.” She could be implying that the humanism of the West, originally informed by the Judeo-Christian idea of love and the Greek praise of knowledge and beauty, have become degraded in the course of Western techno-scientific development, its emanations being the brutality of colonial conquest, two world wars, the Holocaust, the terrors of totalitarianism, the invention of weapons of mass destruction, the dehumanization of capitalism, environmental pollution, and the mass rearing of animals solely for the purpose of killing them. Apparently, argues Coetzee, people are more dog-like than god-like, and arguments for the opposite are, as Peter Singer claims in his *Animal Liberation*, culturally constructed excuses assuaging the conscience of those who contribute to the spread of the violence by eating meat or wearing leather and fur.¹¹⁵

Commenting on Costello's comparison of animal abuse to the atrocities of the Nazi

114 John Maxwell Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 20.

115 Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (1975; New York: New York Review Books/Random House, 1990), chap. 1.

death camps, Northover reaches the following conclusion:

For Costello, in these farms, as in the Nazi death camps, we see human nature fallen to its lowest level, both in terms of the people who run and profit from these farms and the consumers who buy their products. Modern factory farms are “triumphs” of instrumentalist rationalism in terms of the supposed efficiency with which they are run.¹¹⁶

Coetzee connects the slaughterhouse to the Holocaust by claiming that both of these practices have been rationalized with the pseudo-utilitarian science of efficiency. He repeats the view in his 2007 Sydney speech, read by Hugo Weaving at the opening of the art exhibition entitled “Voiceless: I Feel Therefore I Am”:

To everyone who is here tonight, I would guess, it is obvious there is something badly wrong in relations between human beings and other animals; furthermore, that whatever is wrong has become wrong on a huge scale in the last hundred or hundred and fifty years, as traditional animal husbandry has been turned into an industry using industrial methods of production. We can make a long list of the ways in which our relations to animals are wrong, but the food industry, which turns living animals into what it euphemistically calls animal products – animal products and animal by-products – dwarfs all others in the number of individual animal lives it affects.¹¹⁷

Coetzee condemns industrialized death, whether in Nazi death camps or in slaughterhouses, as the greatest disgrace of abstract rationalism and, by extension, of Western humanism. The GOD-DOG anagram returns in *Disgrace* through the use of the word *Lösung* to confirm the fall of humanity from god-like status to the reduced status associated with dogs. The fall is demonstrated through Lurie, who abandons his career as an opera composer for the job of dog undertaker, or “dog-man,”¹¹⁸ as he calls himself. It is hence the gradual evolution of such qualities as pride, vanity and self-centeredness into benevolent charity, humbleness, and respect for the weak that can be perceived as the

116 Northover, “J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello’s Challenge to Philosophy,” 211.

117 John Maxwell Coetzee, “A Word from J. M. Coetzee” (speech the art exhibition “Voiceless: I Feel Therefore I Am,” Sydney, February 22, 2007), <http://hugo.random-scribblings.net/?p=7203#.WNBd6I6mlR0>.

118 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 146.

ultimate theme of *Disgrace*.¹¹⁹

Coetzee's juxtaposition of Shoah with the industrialized death of animals has raised serious concerns about disrespecting Holocaust victims. Interestingly, the controversy is a symptom of a speciesist prejudice that animal life is inherently inferior to human life, and that comparison of the two is derogatory to people. In contrast to those who condemn Coetzee for disrespect, Michael Bell, a University of Warwick scholar, argues that Lurie's reference to the Holocaust should be interpreted as expressing "the objective triviality of the occasion,"¹²⁰ the occasion being the euthanasia of the unwanted dogs. On Bell's reading, then, the reference to the *Lösung* complies with the views of Coetzee's critics as it exalts the Holocaust above animal slaughter, rather than equating them.¹²¹

Bell's interpretation of the Holocaust imagery in *Disgrace* evokes a more nuanced reading of Lurie's reference to the suicide note from *Jude the Obscure*. It can be argued that the word "*menny*," understood as a misspelled form of "many," refers to the human population. Accordingly, the phrase "*because we are too menny*" used as an explanation for animal abuse refers to the fact that the rise of human population necessitates a proportional increase in the animal headage to satisfy the growing demand for meat and other animal products. Therefore, initiatives such as Lurie's seem trivial when juxtaposed with the global trends in animal breeding. The interpretation is partially confirmed in *The Lives of Animals* where Costello admits that one cannot hope for vegetarianism to replace meat-eating because of the global scale of meat consumption.¹²²

The phrase "*because we are too menny*" could also imply the post-industrial separation of people from nature and the associated loss of their sensitivity to animal torment. Elizabeth Costello notices the ignorance in the innocent faces of people,

119 Lowry, "Like a Dog," 14.

120 Michael Bell, "What Is It Like to Be a Nonracist: Costello and Coetzee on the Lives of Animals and Men," in Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, 188.

121 Northover, "J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy," 305-306.

122 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 52.

especially children, who eat meat without feeling any remorse, even when informed that their dietary habits contribute to the suffering of other beings. However, the above reading is complicated by the usage of the adverb “too” in Lurie's quote, implying that the human abuse of animals results from an intended lack of interest in animal hardship. As already noted, Costello refers to such an attitude as willed ignorance and, along the line of Kantian deontological ethics, deems it to be a chief human vice. An emanation of the willed ignorance is abattoirs. According to Costello, slaughterhouses separate people from the realities of food production, thus blinding and desensitizing them not only to the suffering inflicted on animals during the production of meat, but also to other people. Her argument resonates with the Kantian claim that one's treatment of animals affects one's treatment of people.

Michael Pollan (b. 1955), a scholar at the University of California at Berkeley, argues that consumers should be able to witness the slaughter of the animals they are going to eat. Following John Berger's critique of keeping animals out of human sight, he encourages readers to imagine slaughterhouses made of glass, and argues that “much of what happens behind those walls – the cruelty, the carelessness, the filth – would simply have to stop”¹²³ if such a slaughterhouse became reality. Pollan claims that “slaughter is a dehumanizing work if you have to do it every day.”¹²⁴ Based on his own experience during a stay on a chicken farm, Pollan provides the following aphorism: “the most morally troubling thing about killing a chicken is that after a while it is no longer morally troubling.”¹²⁵ Coetzee seems to share Pollan's view on the negative effects of a prolonged exposure to animal death. He depicts Lurie's thoughts about the consequences of continual slaughter in the ensuing passage:

123 Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 235.

124 Ibid., 233.

125 Ibid.

He assumes that people from whom cruelty is demanded in the line of duty, people who work in slaughterhouses, for instance, grow carapaces over their souls. Habit hardens: it must be so in most cases, but it does not seem to be so in his. He does not seem to have the gift of hardness.¹²⁶

Lurie's sympathetic imagination appears to have developed, saving him from what Pollan refers to as dehumanization. The sympathetic imagination as rendered by Coetzee meets the Kantian precept of improving human morality and humanity through a proper treatment of animals.

Interestingly, the clinic of the Animal Welfare League where Bev euthanizes animals has a function similar to that of the slaughterhouse; people use it to lift from themselves the responsibility for killing unwanted animals. Jolly perceives such a shift of responsibility as another example of applying instrumental rationalism to dealings with the less privileged. Alasdair MacIntyre would relate it to the Weberian Protestant work ethic, bureaucratic managerialism, or “disembodied personhood” of the Western business style of working, designed to multiply profit at the lowest cost possible. Thus “*too menny*,” in Coetzee's specific use in *Disgrace*, could be interpreted as “too rationalistic,” i.e., excessively attached to the idea of rationality as a criterion for excluding non-rational beings from moral consideration. The ultimate rendition of such utilitarian rationalism is the fact that healthy animals, dogs in particular, are put down solely because they are no longer considered to be useful for their owners.

The above interpretation of Lurie's reference to *Jude the Obscure* is, however, highly speculative, based solely on the assumption that “*menny*” is a misspelling and that Coetzee relates it to people, not to animals. Despite the contingency, it seems that the term is used to express Lurie's doubt about the possibility of sensitizing the society to the pain and unjustified suffering of animals, much less of inducing their moral transformation. On the

¹²⁶ Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 143.

one hand, by evoking the note, Lurie implies his regret at killing unwanted animals; on the other hand, however, he may be expressing his helplessness and a sense of injustice as the fate of the killed animals is not their fault. Rather, one should blame the self-sufficient rationalism of economic gain. Like Jude's children, the dogs suffer unearned misery; they suffer because of people's failure to take care of their fertility. To continue the analogy, it could be argued that Lurie, like Jude's illegitimate son, kills them to ease their misery. The fact that he can identify the animals' anguish testifies to his sympathetic approach to them. The intertext to Thomas Hardy, employed to illustrate the tragic fate of dogs, confirms that Lurie's sympathies have shifted from purebreds to mongrels.¹²⁷

The transformation begins when Lurie becomes one of Bev's patients. Initially, he does not like Bev, presumably due to her effusive preoccupation with animals, and also because she ignores the class divisions among the dogs. Lurie may not like the fact that although she is white she treats mongrels with as much care as purebreds. In a sense, she subverts the imagery which puts her and other whites on the top of the social order. Although not stated in the novel directly, it is possible that Lurie thinks of Bev as a traitor to white values. In order to dissimulate such a subversion, he refers to her as an eccentric not worth being taken seriously. He also deems her views on intuitive man-animal communication as nonsensical. When she asks about his attitude to animals, his answer is sarcastic and mocking: "[do] I like animals? I eat them, so I suppose I must like them, some parts of them."¹²⁸ Notwithstanding the spite, however, Lurie is soon amazed by Bev's tenderness toward an ill goat. He stops ironizing, and seeing her failure at helping the goat, he tries to comfort her. He realizes that Bev not only knows how to calm animals, but she also seems to understand their emotions. Her care counters Pollan's claim that prolonged cruelty to animals decreases one's sensitivity to their suffering; for Bev, as Lurie

127 Caldwell, *Imagining the Other*, 14.

128 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 81.

notes, “*it gets harder all the time.*”¹²⁹

Amazed by Bev's devotion, Lurie tries to imagine the ill goat's feelings. He fails, but shortly afterward, he is literally put in the goat's position. After the attack, he and Lucy stay at the Shaws, and Bev takes care of his burns. While he is having his dressing changed, he notices that Bev treats him with the same tenderness as she treated the goat. At this point, he wonders if the animal felt the same peacefulness as he does. Although unintended, this is an attempt at sympathizing with the goat. The experience makes Lurie reciprocate Bev's gentleness; they soon start a love affair. Lurie's attraction to Bev, whom he perceives as unattractive, particularly in comparison to Soraya and Melanie, is surprising and at the same time indicative of Lurie's emerging change.

Coetzee depicts the development of Lurie's sympathetic imagination for animals by demonstrating his pity for the two sheep that Petrus has bought for slaughter to celebrate his new land acquisition. The sheep stay tethered to a post for three days in the sun without anything to drink or eat. Initially vexed by their bleating, Lurie eventually resents Petrus for causing their suffering and relocates the animals to a shaded pasture. However, the following day, they are moved back into the sun. Disturbed by their torment, Lurie begins to sympathize with them:

A bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians, he does not know how. The bond is not one of affection. It is not even a bond with these two in particular, whom he could not pick out from a mob in a field. Nevertheless, suddenly and without reason, their lot has become important to him.¹³⁰

For the first time, Lurie devotes his full attention to animals; significantly, he does it “without reason,” which can be interpreted as Coetzee's critique of the task-oriented mindset of techno-analytical rationalism. Surprised with his sympathy for the sheep, Lurie

¹²⁹ Ibid., 219 (emphasis original).

¹³⁰ Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 126.

considers improving his character: "[t]he sun beats down on his face in all its springtime radiance. Do I have to change, he thinks? Do I have to become like Bev Shaw?"¹³¹ The change becomes visible during the party at which Petrus serves cooked mutton. Recalling the two sheep he sympathized with, Lurie thinks to himself: "I am going to eat this [...]. I am going to eat it and ask forgiveness afterwards."¹³² Animals have ceased to be a mere food source for Lurie; that he is going to "ask forgiveness" means that they have become ethically significant to him. Lurie's moral transformation begins with recognizing the value of animal life, gradually affecting his attitude to people, especially women, victims of the same type of utilitarian approach as animals.

Initially, Lurie is interested in seducing young and sexually attractive women in pursuit of sexual gratification and from a need to confirm his male superiority and sexual prowess. His affair with the unattractive yet sensitive Bev signals his transformation from a self-centered seeker of superficial bodily pleasure into an altruist interested in love based on sympathy and tenderness. Personal qualities are becoming more important to him than sexual appeal. It can be argued that, due to his exposure to animals, Lurie's erotic, self-oriented imagination is gradually superseded by an emergent sympathetic imagination, vanity by compassionate commitment, and haughty patriarchalism by modesty and tolerance. An exposure to animals, especially to their suffering, makes Lurie more sympathetic not only to non-humans, but also to humans, an ideal compatible with Kant's thought.

Drawing upon the 1990 study *Sexual Personae* by Camille Paglia (b. 1947), a scholar at the University of Arts in Philadelphia, one could claim that Lurie is in the process of turning his "aggressive Western eye,"¹³³ a gaze separating the observer from the observed

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid., 131.

133 Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 104; cf. John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 26.

object, away from the vision of women as reduced to their bodies toward an attitude of respect for women as individual beings. Congruent with the process is Lurie's increasing ability to recognize the individuality of animals; in the course of his stay at Lucy's farm he manages to individualize Katy and the lame dog, Driepoot. However, Wendy Woodward maintains that the individualization of the two dogs is limited because they are not depicted as active agents. Moreover, except for Katy and Driepoot, no other animals are individualized in *Disgrace*, although they abound in the novel.¹³⁴

Despite her insight, Woodward's claim can be questioned by noting Lurie's attentiveness to the infected goat Bev is going to euthanize; Bev seems to humanize the goat by asking it questions: "What do you say, my friend? [...] What do you say? Is it enough?"¹³⁵ and by trying to comfort it: "[s]uch a good old fellow, so brave and straight and confident!"¹³⁶ The geese which Lurie observes with his daughter, and which he refers to after coming back to Cape Town, also seem individualized; they are one of the first things he misses from Lucy's farm. One should also mention the two sheep pitied by him when they are waiting to be slaughtered. They are referred to by their breed name, Persians, which also makes them slightly more individualized. Significantly, each of these individualizing encounters with animals reveals Lurie's accumulating potential to extend the limits of his sympathetic imagination. An important development in this aspect is the moment he tries to comfort Bev after she injects the goat with a lethal drug. Previously sarcastic and scornful about her devotion to animals, now he not only respects her values, but also tries to emulate them, concentrating his full attention on the euthanized animals. An individual approach can be perceived as Bev's way of showing respect for the dogs she euthanizes. It is by following her charitable approach to animals that Lurie's sympathetic

134 Wendy Woodward, *The Animal Gaze: Animal Subjectivities in Southern African Narratives* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), 128-129.

135 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 83.

136 Ibid.

imagination begins to develop. Consequently, although he “tries not to sentimentalize the animals he kills, or to sentimentalize Bev Shaw,”¹³⁷ in a sense he does become Bev Shaw, a change he deemed impossible before starting to help at the clinic.

It is worth recalling that Coetzee's purpose in *Disgrace* does not seem to be an accurate depiction of animal states of mind; rather, the novelist is striving to show the possibility of imaginatively inhabiting animal mental states, and that even people as skeptical about the need of sympathizing with animals as Lurie can have a change of heart, thus refining not only their view of animals but also the quality of their own humanity. Although Lurie's transformation is not complete, nor is it certain whether it is going to proceed any further, Coetzee still seems to present Lurie's story as an example. As Northover claims, Lurie is an unsympathetic Everyman figure whose initial views on animals are probably similar to those of many of Coetzee's readers; due to the similarity, the readers identify with Lurie, and as his attitudes change, so may the readers review their own attitudes, if not toward animals then perhaps toward those in positions of weakness. Accordingly, improving one's moral character through considerate treatment of animals testifies to the Kantian overtone of Coetzee's work.¹³⁸

Another parallel with Kant concerns Coetzee's adjustment of the sympathetic imagination to the logic of transcendental illusion. Lurie cannot know if Bev really has any insight into the animals she tends, nor can he actually recreate the ill goat's peacefulness, but this inability may be of little importance because both of them do eventually sympathize with animals. Bev's treatment of animals is informed by what she *a priori* assumes they may feel; she does not know animal states of mind but she behaves as if she did, and it is this assumption that enables her to sympathize with them. The method works because, as Lurie notices, it makes the animals she takes care of adopt her calmness,

137 Ibid., 143.

138 Northover, “J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy,” 206.

making their treatment easier and more effective.

Similarly, Lurie's assumption about Katy's feeling of abandonment is a projection based on his former views about dog breeds. It is impossible to know if Katy feels discarded, but an illusion of her abandonment procures a sympathetic response that is welcome from the ethical point of view. Accordingly, sympathy toward animals seems to reflect the literary type of sympathetic imagination described in "What Does it Mean 'to Understand'?" According to Coetzee, sympathy does not require one literally to access the other's perspective; it suffices *a priori* to assume that such an access is possible. As argues Costello in *Slow Man*, for the success of the sympathetic imagination, there is no need for its object to be real; what is needed instead is a benevolent intention to sympathize. Therefore, it is not important whether Lurie's assumptions about animals are true or not as long as he eventually discards his prejudices, enhancing his morality.

A good-willed intention corresponds to Kant's deontology, present in the idea of the categorical imperative, and also inscribed in the logic of transcendental illusion. Coetzee's animal ethics also seem congruent with the weakly anthropocentric theories of Hargrove, Norton and Lee. Coetzee does not advise his readers to replace human ethics with an animal ethics. On the contrary, he claims that animal ethics should be included in human value systems, and that a way of achieving the goal is to sensitize people to animal hardship by stimulating their imagination. Therefore, Coetzee's animal ethics is both Kantian and weakly anthropocentric because it denotes respect for animals as a question of good will, moral sensitivity and imagination. It is worth mentioning at this point that the attitude encouraged by Coetzee is dialectical in the sense described by Richard E. Nisbett: it requires an openness to alterity and the ability to harmonize opposing notions, among them animality and humanity.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ See Richard E. Nisbett, *Mindware: Tools for Smart Thinking* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 28-32.

According to Coetzee, respect for animals originates with people, in their willingness to sympathize with the other, for no-one can be forced to act morally by any external authority, be it law, science, or even ethical prescriptions. Coetzee's principal ideological mouthpiece, Elizabeth Costello, does not foist vegetarianism on anybody; she rather persuades by sharing her deepest thoughts with other people, and exposing herself to criticism, trivialization, and hostility. While she seems confident in handling other people's scorn, she does not seem as poised when she encounters the disapproval of her kin. Unable to bear the pressure, she suffers an emotional breakdown. Despite her despair, Costello should still be admired for her encouragement and her unrelentingly dialectical attitude.

Costello does not threaten others with any punishment for abusing animals; she merely voices her doubts about the morality of humans who ignore such abuse. As in the weakly anthropocentric paradigm, her concern is people, and in a longer perspective their ethical standing. Because of her emphasis on developing moral character, it can be argued that the animal ethics propagated in *The Lives of Animals* resonate with Kantian ethics. The reason why Costello opposes animal abuse is because she finds it detrimental to the objective of improving one's own humanity. She does not want to base animal ethics on hypothetical imperatives, derived from interests or enforced with a threat of punishment, but on categorical ones, i.e., that stem from an internal will for an ethics that is universally binding, including the man-animal relation. It could also be argued that her vegetarianism and the associated pro-animal activism fit Kant's idea of moral education, according to which morality requires exercise, for instance through a respectful treatment of animals, or by setting the example of one's own morality.¹⁴⁰

Despite Costello's support of vegetarianism, Coetzee is frequently critical about certain aspects of the animal discourse. Himself a vegetarian, he often creates characters

140 Cf. G. Felicitas Munzel, *Kant's Conception of Pedagogy: Toward Education for Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012).

who question pro-animal values. On numerous occasions in *The Lives of Animals*, he criticizes animal rights theory for its excessive abstractness, describes it as a means for establishing human dominance over animals, and also points to the occasional inconsistency of the claims propagated by pro-animal activists. At times, activists misinterpret his self-reflective insights. As shown in Chapter V, Peter Singer deems Coetzee's criticism of animal discourse provided in *The Lives of Animals* to be an epitome of moral escapism, dictated by his fear of criticism. Instead, it seems that Coetzee strives to present a global viewpoint, motivated by the scholarly standard of impartiality. The sole influence he exerts on his readers is by appeals to their conscience and emotions. Rather than providing ready-made solutions, he seems to encourage his audience to reflect on their personal relations with animals, and then to devise their own animal ethics. Although he sometimes "shock[s] into thinking"¹⁴¹ with his vivid descriptions of animal abuse, Coetzee can still be recognized as a Kantian because, like Kant, he bases ethics on a good and unrestricted will. There is also a strong resonance between his weakly anthropocentric encouragement to improve morally by ameliorating one's own attitude to animals and Kant's pedagogical teachings.

It can be claimed that the reason why Lurie progresses toward a more refined humanity is because he exercises his morality by sympathizing with animals. Initially, he is indifferent to animals, yet after sympathizing with Petrus's sheep and witnessing Bev's tenderness to the ill ram, he commits himself to working in a veterinary clinic. He feeds animals, and he takes care of ill dogs, without any regard for their breed; his main task is to assist at euthanizing the unwanted dogs. With time, he becomes attached to the mongrels; he begins to perceive them as individuals, gradually becoming unable to tolerate the mistreatment of their to-be-cremated bodies. Coetzee describes Lurie's new sensibility

141 Aaltola, "Coetzee and Alternative Animal Ethics," in *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics: Philosophical Perspectives on Literature*, ed. Anton Leist and Peter Singer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 134 (emphasis original).

in the following excerpt:

One at a time he fetches them out of the cage at the back and leads or carries them into the theatre. To each, in what will be its last minutes, Bev gives her fullest attention, stroking it, talking to it, easing its passage. [H]e is the one who holds the dog still as the needle finds the vein and the drug hits the heart and the legs buckle and the eyes dim. [...] Worst are those that sniff him and try to lick his hand. He has never liked being licked, and his first impulse is to pull away. Why pretend to be a chum when in fact one is a murderer? But then he relents. Why should a creature with the shadow of death upon it feel him flinch away as if its touch were abhorrent? So he lets them lick him, if they want to, just as Bev Shaw strokes them and kisses them if they will let her.¹⁴²

Reaching for the caged dogs, then bringing them to the clinic theatre to be put down, Lurie metaphorically enters the Dark Chamber; he witnesses animal death, he imagines the dogs' fear and misery. He also interacts with them by reflecting their imagined feelings. The following passage testifies to Lurie's insight into the euthanized animals:

His whole being is gripped by what happens in the theatre. He is convinced the dogs know their time has come. Despite the silence and the painlessness of the procedure, despite the good thoughts that Bev Shaw thinks and that he tries to think, despite the airtight bags in which they tie the newmade corpses, the dogs in the yard smell what is going on inside. They flatten their ears, they droop their tails, as if they too feel the disgrace of dying; locking their legs, they have to be pulled or pushed or carried over the threshold. On the table some snap wildly left and right, some whine plaintively; none will look straight at the needle in Bev's hand, which they somehow know is going to harm them terribly.¹⁴³

It can be argued that the overpowering sense of sorrow and sympathy for the killed dogs created by Coetzee's lucid, factual, and detached style in the above passage is to reflect Lurie's surging emotions. A moment of such emotional surge occurs after a day spent euthanizing dogs; on his way back home, he stops at a roadside and cries:

He had thought he would get used to it. But that is not what happens. The more killings he assists in, the more jittery he gets. One Sunday evening, driving home in Lucy's kombi, he actually has to stop at the roadside to recover himself. Tears flow down his face that he cannot stop; his hands shake.¹⁴⁴

142 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 142-143.

143 Ibid., 143.

144 Ibid., 142-143.

Tom Herron claims that because of his engagement at the clinic, Lurie experiences not only “episodes of reciprocity,”¹⁴⁵ but also “first flickerings of sympathy and of love.”¹⁴⁶ As already mentioned, Lurie refers to his reciprocity by calling himself a “dog-man.”¹⁴⁷ Eventually, he treats his work at the farm as more dignified than his professorship. The degree of Lurie's change can be demonstrated by comparing his humbleness at burning the dog bodies to the arrogance he had exhibited before the university committee.¹⁴⁸

Coetzee demonstrates Lurie's moral evolution through his attitude to the corpses of euthanized dogs. Afraid that the incinerator staff might disfigure dog bodies in order to better fit them into the furnace, he decides to do the burning himself. Every Monday morning, he transports dog corpses to the incinerator, and without any help “consigns the bodies in their black bags to the flames.”¹⁴⁹ He does not care about befriending the incinerator crew, nor is he interested in their opinion of him, nor in the poor crowd scavenging in the hospital waste stored next to the incinerator. At this point, the reason why he volunteers for the job is not to help Bev or the dogs, but for himself, or rather for “his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing.”¹⁵⁰ As far as Lurie's ultimate motivation is his own human self, Coetzee shows his animal ethics to be anthropocentric. The anthropocentrism is weak, in Hargrove's terms, because it classifies dignified treatment of non-human beings, including animal corpses, as the responsibility of people.

Coetzee makes a reference to the Kantian idea of disinterestedness. Lurie knows that his concern to incinerate dog bodies in what he considers a proper way may seem strange and pointless to other people. Yet it could be argued that Lurie's devotion to a completely

145 Herron, “The Dog Man: Becoming an Animal in Coetzee's *Disgrace*,” 485.

146 Ibid., 471.

147 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 146.

148 Caldwell, *Imagining the Other*, 20.

149 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 144.

150 Ibid., 146.

useless activity is how Coetzee criticizes the utilitarian ethos of techno-analytical rationality. His actions are futile; there is literally no benefit in his efforts for anybody, and yet he perseveres in the task. The following excerpt reflects how Lurie is perceived by others: “he saves the honor of corpses because there is no one else stupid enough to do it. That is what he is becoming: stupid, daft, wrongheaded.”¹⁵¹ Coetzee portrays Lurie’s motives as non-rational; from this perspective, it seems that Lurie abides by Costello’s encouragement to follow the convictions of the heart. Lurie’s conviction is that corpses should not be beaten to allow more convenient disposal. The plural number of “corpses” and the lack of the definite article before it indicate that the rule has a universal usage, meaning that it is applicable both to people and to animals. Although it may be senseless, Lurie follows the rule, respecting humans and also animals, whether alive or dead. Such a cross-species universality reminds one of Kant’s categorical imperative, according to which moral agents should act on maxims that can be willed as universal law, without any limitations. Coetzee seems to extend anthropocentric ethics to animals by adjusting them to the requirement of universality stipulated by Kant in his discussion about the basis of morally binding law.

6.3. The Ethics of Animal Death

The essence of Coetzee’s animal ethics is Kantian in the sense of the thesis that a sympathetic treatment of animals leads to moral development in people. Lurie’s advancement begins with Katy, the bitch with whom he shares British identity, and the two sheep he relocates from an open field to the shade out of sympathy for their suffering in bright sunshine. At the beginning of his work at Bev’s clinic, he sympathizes with an ill

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

goat. When he goes back to Cape Town and begins to miss his daughter, he remembers the geese they observed in a moment of familial intimacy. Eventually, Lurie turns to mongrels, the type of dog he used to despise, mainly due to their apartheid association with black people. The progression continues till Lurie sympathizes with actual human beings: Bev Shaw, his daughter Lucy, his unborn grandchild, and finally his future self as a grandfather. When at the end of the novel he observes Lucy at work in her garden and notices her pregnancy, he hopes that he will make a good grandfather, despite his shortcomings. He is also optimistic about the unborn child who, although racially not pure, will extend his family and “with luck will be just as solid, just as long-lasting”¹⁵² as its mother.

A symptom of Lurie’s sympathy for himself is his self-criticism. He acknowledges that he has abused women while living a life of a womanizer. He admits that his fondness for romantic poets has been artificial and that he has wasted time searching a confirmation of his elitism in their verse. Despite his longtime study of Wordsworth, a poet associated with pastoral poetry, he has not developed a liking for rural life, nor has he learnt to respect the people and animals inhabiting the country. He changes his approach only after directly experiencing rural life on Lucy’s farm. The change is detectable in his evolving literary preferences; he gradually abandons Wordsworth and Byron, the two Romantic poets he had used to stimulate his erotic imagination, and he thinks of re-reading Victor Hugo, whom he considers the poet of grandfatherhood. The transition is also seen in his attitude toward Lucy’s child; initially perceiving it as an end to “[his] own kind,”¹⁵³ at the conclusion of the story he begins to perceive the child as his family, and as his promising successor. He achieves the change by gradually supplementing his instrumental rationalism with a sympathetic insight into other beings, animals, and his own self. It could

¹⁵² Ibid., 217.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 194.

be argued that the supplementation is the main cause of the dawning development in his humanity.

Despite the progress, however, Lurie does not manage to take his newfound sympathetic skills beyond animals and himself. He has still not learnt to properly sympathize across gender, which is confirmed by an incident with a prostitute after his return to Cape Town, nor has he developed sympathy across race, which is visible in his continuing distrust of Petrus, and during his visit to the parents of Melanie, the Isaacs. He meets them to apologize for abusing their daughter, and asks for forgiveness, but at the same time he lusts after Melanie's younger sister, Desiree. Later, when he sees Melanie on stage, he thinks of her as his sexual trophy. Despite his attempt, he is never reconciled with the Isaacs. The visit turns out to be meaningless and artificial. As argued in Chapter IV, he meets with the Isaacs to dissimulate his immoralities by projecting himself as apologetic and full of remorse. The visit can be interpreted as an instance of his persistent narcissism.

Lurie seems truly to sympathize only across the species boundary. He learns to respect mongrels, giving them attention and "what he no longer has difficulty calling by its proper name: love."¹⁵⁴ Such a declaration seems exaggerated, if not comical. Lurie's comicality is particularly discernible in the ostentatious bow he takes before Desiree and her mother. Interestingly, he seems aware of the comicality of this pretentious gesture:

He has a vision of himself stretched out on an operating table. A scalpel flashes; from throat to groin he is laid open; he sees it all yet feels no pain. A surgeon, bearded, bends over him, frowning. *What is all this stuff?* growls the surgeon. He pokes at the gall bladder. *What is this?* He cuts it out, tosses it aside. He pokes at the heart. *What is this?*¹⁵⁵

Although there is a dose of auto-irony in the above quote, it should be perceived in terms of Lurie's self-criticism, signifying his changing self-perception. Coetzee makes the self-

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 219.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 170 (emphasis original).

criticism particularly palpable by having Lurie juxtapose his heart with a gall bladder, gall being a substance symbolizing shame and resentment. The novelist implies that the heart will follow the gall bladder by being cut out and tossed aside, presumably as useless. The symbolism may be interpreted as indicating Lurie's self-reproach for his pretentious show of artificial empathy for the Isaac family.

Apart from parodying Lurie's deficient sympathy, Coetzee could also be referring to the tendency in African literature to portray whites as having sympathy for animals but not for blacks. In the short story "Mrs. Plum" (1967) of the South African novelist Es'kia Mphahlele's (1919-2008), the titular protagonist dismisses her gardener for fear that he could harm her well-bred dogs. In *A Grain of Wheat*, a 1986 novel by a Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o (b. 1938), a black man is killed because he has aimed a stone at a white man's dog. In a 1991 story "Women at Work" by South African novelist Sindiwe Magona (b. 1943), a woman worker complains that her wages are less than the money spent by her employer on dog food. Christine Sego Caldwell, an Indiana University scholar argues that "[t]his literary history of sympathy towards dogs becomes a marker of colonial power because these people can afford the luxury of animals as companions but choose not to befriend black Africans."¹⁵⁶ Not only does the bias testify to the white contempt of blacks, but it also exposes an inability or unwillingness on the part of whites to sympathize with each other. Lurie's racism, his attachment to pure-bred Katy, and his work in euthanizing mongrels correspond to the theme of dog privilege in African literature. Moreover, through his involvement at the clinic, Lurie may in fact be redirecting sympathy onto himself, dogs being only a means to the goal. He could also be doing it to distinguish himself as kind-hearted and ready to sacrifice himself for others, including animals. The senselessness of his "service of dead dogs,"¹⁵⁷ if approached outside the

¹⁵⁶ Caldwell, *Imagining the Other*, 21.

¹⁵⁷ Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 146.

Kantian paradigm of disinterestedness, could be interpreted as a method of self-ennoblement through martyrological sacrifice.¹⁵⁸

On a more positive reading, Lurie never complains to anybody about the work at the clinic; if he has a moment of weakness, such as when he cries on the road, it is when he is alone, and he keeps inconveniences to himself. It is unlikely that he expects admiration and pity for his sacrifice. His dedication to burning dog corpses with respect appears genuine; while doing it, he prefers to remain anonymous and unnoticed at the incinerator. His transformation is not complete, which conforms with Coetzee's avoidance of pathetic stories about fulsome transformations. The growth of Lurie's humanity is gradual and never categorically ascertained; in this sense, his moral development reflects Kant's pedagogical writings, according to which refining humanity involves constant exercise and repetition.

Although seemingly more sympathetic to dogs than to people, Lurie does eventually distance himself from dogs. A marker of the distance is the final scene of *Disgrace*, in which he decides to euthanize his favorite dog, Driepoot. As he explains to Bev, he does it because the dog's death cannot be avoided, and postponing it would only mean deferring the discomfort and pain of doing what will happen anyway. He does not want to keep the dog alive solely for his own convenience. His carrying Driepoot to the euthanizing table in his arms evokes the love and devotion with which Christian prophets sacrificed their lambs before God. The Christian reference strongly contrasts with Coetzee's allusion to the Holocaust when describing what Bev and Lurie do in the clinic:

He and Bev Shaw are engaged in one of their sessions of *Lösung*. One by one he brings in the cats, then the dogs: the old, the blind, the halt, the crippled, the maimed, but also the young, the sound - all those whose term has come. One by one Bev touches them, speaks to them, comforts them, and puts them away, then

158 See Josephine Donovan, "Miracles of Creation: Animals in J. M. Coetzee's Work," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 43, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 83, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0043.112>.

stands back and watches while he seals up the remains in a black plastic shroud.¹⁵⁹

The allusion to the Holocaust is intensified by the presence of organic waste incinerators in the novel. Coetzee seems to compare them with the furnaces in which Nazis burned their gassed victims during the Second World War. Such a comparison recalls Costello's juxtaposition of the meat industry with the massacre of Jews during the Holocaust. It has to be noted again that Coetzee does not compare the victims of Nazism to animals; rather, he pinpoints indifference to the suffering and death of the other, be it a slaughtered animal or a victim of Nazi ideology. While Coetzee acknowledges those who suffer, he seems more concerned with those who ignore suffering, and who do not recognize such ignorance as a moral vice. As he argues in *The Lives of Animals*, the reason for the ignorance is a self-centered desire to retain the *status quo*, and while during the Second World War *status quo* frequently meant staying alive, nowadays it rather means maintaining the safety of one's comfort zone. It could be claimed that by killing Driepoot, Lurie leaves the safety of his comfort zone and, demonstrating moral courage, he faces the other's death in the closest possible manner, that is, by inflicting it himself. The act is dramatic in its consequences, yet any other decision would imply ignorance of dogs' life conditions in South Africa. Louis Tremaine, a University of Richmond scholar, in his 2003 article argues that Lurie's decision to euthanize Driepoot is "not a defeat, but a liberation from a delusion,"¹⁶⁰ that is, from disregarding the harshness of dogs' lives.

Lurie does not believe in his moral transformation, because of his age and gender. He refers to the inability by quoting from Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Torso of an Archaic Apollo." Coetzee presents Lurie's interpretation of the poem's last line: "*Du musst dein Leben ändern!*: you must change your life. Well, he is too old to heed, too old to change.

¹⁵⁹ Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 218-219.

¹⁶⁰ Louis Tremaine, "The Embodied Soul: Animal Being in the Work of J. M. Coetzee," *Contemporary Literature* 44, no. 4 (2003): 610.

Lucy may be able to bend to the tempest; he cannot, not with honor.”¹⁶¹ Lurie is doubtful whether he can overcome his inability to sympathize with blacks and women. However, at the close of *Disgrace*, he does change; once ignorant of animal lives, now he has learnt to love them. Lurie’s sympathetic imagination begins to progress, and it is his involvement with animals that initiates the process. His utilitarian rationalism changes into a disinterested will to do what he thinks is right. Considering his hopes about grandfatherhood, it could be argued that the change will continue, and soon he will overcome his prejudices. Although initially not prominent, animals eventually assume a pivotal role in the novel, mainly because they initiate Lurie’s moral improvement.

The absence of animals in *Slow Man* might be the reason for Paul Rayment’s failure at sympathizing. He remains in the comfort zone of his self-indulging delusions despite the Jokićs’ kindness and Costello’s direct admonition to discard pretense and be genuine. He is overwhelmed by their efforts, and it could be claimed that his limited sympathy is a defense reaction against increasing confusion. At the end of the novel, when the Jokićs give him a specially adjusted bike, he appears to reciprocate their kindness, but his behavior turns out to be a pretense, because after a short ride he puts the bike away, never to use it again. Not able to imagine across gender, ethnicity and disability, he withdraws into a narcissistic conviction of self-exceptionality. Without animals, he has limited chances to exercise his moral responses, among them empathy, reciprocity and gratitude for received help; instead, he persists in pretense and narcissism.

6.4 The Ethics of Animal Undeath

Driepoot’s death could be interpreted in a less anthropocentric manner. As already

161 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 209.

mentioned, one of the main charges against Coetzee and his idea of sympathetic imagination is that it silences the other, specifically animals. In *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee claims through Costello that animal silence is part of their “heroic”¹⁶² resistance against human domination. However, such a view presupposes a supreme role for human language with regard to the nonhuman world, confirming the logic of Derrida’s *l’animot*, according to which the repression of animals happens by representing them in generic, de-individualizing terms. Coetzee seems to argue that exclusion from language exempts animals from the reductivism of *l’animot*. However, silence does not save animals from physical harm and death; on the contrary, their silence makes animal abuse seem insignificant and permitted. Therefore, as Elisa Aaltola argues, silence in *The Lives of Animals* does not mean not speaking, but it refers to not being heard; it is a matter of human ignorance.¹⁶³

In this context, the silence of animals is heroic not because it is a form of resistance, but because it denotes their survival despite being long exposed to human oppression. It is also a sign of the helplessness of what Derrida refers to as the “artificial, infernal, virtually interminable survival”¹⁶⁴ of livestock necessitated by a consumerist economy. Coetzee draws upon Derrida through Costello’s claim that in the industrialized conditions of meat production the animal never dies; Costello refers to animals’ “state of undeath”¹⁶⁵ in the following excerpt:

Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them.¹⁶⁶

162 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 25.

163 Aaltola, “Coetzee and Alternative Animal Ethics,” 121.

164 Derrida, “The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” 395

165 Walther, “Refusing to Speak: The Ethics of Animal Silence and Sacrifice in Coetzee and Derrida,” *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) 12, no. 3 (2014): 79.

166 Coetzee, “The Lives of Animals,” 21.

The endless generation of animal bodies for human consumption obscures their death, which is why Coetzee, speaking through the persona of Costello, claims that today's animal suffering exceeds that of the Holocaust. In her comment on the above quote, Aaltola argues that the purpose of the Holocaust was the extermination of a group of people, an annihilation, but "animal industries do not have such an end; for them death in itself is a sought-after product – they constantly need new bodies and lives to turn into death."¹⁶⁷ An animal cannot simply die and its body decompose. Rather, the animal is killed in its youth, processed, and eaten or used as a raw material, and its genes are improved and then used again. In a sense, animals are deprived of their lives as well as of their deaths, and thus of their whole existence.¹⁶⁸

Coetzee's point is that the meat industry seeks animal lives, rather than animal death, because it perpetuates itself by a constant supply of new animal bodies. He alludes to the denial of animal finitude in the title of *The Lives of Animals*, implying that animals can only have lives, without discernible deaths. Moreover, arguing that animals confront people with silence, he designates language as the means of the denial. In his 2000 study, *Electric Animal*, Akira Mizuta Lippit (b. 1964), a University of Southern California scholar, supplies the following logic for the linguistic undeath of animals:

[...] by tracking the animal across the philosophical spectrum, one discovers the systemic manner in which the figure of the animal comes to portray a serial logic: the animal is incapable of language; that lack prevents the animal from experiencing death; this in turn suspends the animal in a virtual, perpetual existence.¹⁶⁹

The reason why lack of language denies one's death is that, apart from being a biological

167 Aaltola, "Coetzee and Alternative Animal Ethics," 132.

168 Walther, "Refusing to Speak," 78-79.

169 Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 7.

fact, death is also a narrative event. It forms a part of biography; dying, burial, and decay constitute stages of one's story rendered by the performative function of language. Death is a biological event but its meaning is conveyed through language; accordingly, death is recognized as death when it is named such. However, as Costello points out, animal death cannot be properly recognized because the places of animal killing, abattoirs, are kept out of human sight, resulting in widespread dissimulation of animal death, epitomized by people's frequent failure to associate meat with animal slaughter.

It is the homogenization of animals that Coetzee opposes by depicting the euthanasia of Lurie's befriended dog Driepoot. The scene illustrates the Derridean idea of individualizing death. In *The Gift of Death* (2008), Derrida argues that death grants singularity:

[...] to have the experience of one's absolute singularity and apprehend one's own death amounts to the same thing. Death is very much that which nobody else can undergo or confront in my place. My irreplaceability is therefore conferred, delivered, "given," one can say, by death.¹⁷⁰

Derrida bases his theory on the Heideggerian idea that everyone is exceptional for having his/her own death, without any possibility to exchange it or to deny it. Driepoot's death in *Disgrace* is thus an act of recognizing his individuality. In contrast to the meat industry where animals are nameless possessed goods, Lurie singularizes Driepoot by carrying him to the euthanizing table like a sacrificial lamb, so that his death is acknowledged and named; the dog will die loved, and his body will not be disrespectfully utilized, but cremated with reverence. Significantly, Lurie's work at the incinerating facility is no longer senseless or wrongheaded; on the contrary, it denotes an attempt to confer distinctiveness on animals by respecting their deaths. It can be claimed that Coetzee's animal ethics involves recognizing animals' individuality, and depicting them as non-

170 Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 41.

consumable goods.

Through Driepoot's sacrifice, Coetzee undermines the utilitarian, de-individualizing approach to animals, an approach which Jolly perceives as detrimental also to humanity:

Disgrace examines the extent to which the related concepts of humanity and humanitarianism on the one hand and patriarchal culture on the other are essentially constitutive of one another. The novel interrogates what to be humane might mean without recourse to the species boundary between human and nonhuman animals, what acting as a humanitarian might mean without invoking public testimony and the law as watchdogs, and how our sense of ourselves as human is radically undermined by our addiction to a cult of the rational – what Coetzee's recent work identifies as an irrational fetishization of instrumentalization, a profoundly secular addiction to the god of efficiency.¹⁷¹

Sparing Driepoot an industrialized death, Lurie defies the utilitarian paradigm of the “economies of instrumentalism,” and by approaching the dog as an individual living being, he also contests the speciesist logic of *l'animot*. Driepoot can thus be viewed as a scapegoat figure sacrificed for all the mass killed animals.¹⁷² Yet it seems that the dog dies not only for the maltreated animals, but also for Lurie and, by extension, for people. Coetzee hints at the redemptive interpretation of the dog's death when Lurie reflects on the nature of his relation with Driepoot:

It is not “his” in any sense; he has been careful not to give it a name (though Bev Shaw refers to it as *Driepoot*); nevertheless, he is sensible of a generous affection streaming out toward him from the dog. Arbitrarily, unconditionally, he has been adopted; the dog would die for him, he knows.¹⁷³

Arguing that “the dog would die for him,” Lurie not only foreshadows Driepoot's euthanasia, but also implies its cause and meaning. Accepting responsibility for the dog's fate, he takes animal death out of the sphere of mere ideas; unlike most meat eaters who do

171 Jolly, “Going to the Dogs,” 150.

172 Cf. Chris Danta, “Like a Dog . . . Like a Lamb: Becoming Sacrificial Animal in Kafka and Coetzee,” *New Literary History* 38 (2007): 721-737, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2008.0011>.

173 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 215 (emphasis original).

not associate their dietary habits with killing actual living beings, he experiences animal death as a palpable reality, an effect of his decision. It can be argued that by connecting Lurie with Driepoot's death Coetzee exposes and defies the consumerist lack of connection between food and its source, an ignorance that makes the cruelties of the meat industry possible.¹⁷⁴

Becoming more tangible, death emerges as a more palpable reality also in terms of Lurie's own mortality. He begins the work on the Byron opera, hoping that it will prolong his posthumous memory. Apparently, he believes in the Platonic idea that mortality can be defied by "leaving something behind";¹⁷⁵ in *Symposium*, Plato argues through Socrates that people want to extend their mortal existence by bringing up children, contributing to the development of their communities, artistic activity, or fame in combat.¹⁷⁶ The character of Elizabeth Costello, a world-acclaimed novelist famous for her contribution into the feminist discourse, undermines such a god-like vision of man, claiming that "it is only a matter of time before the books which you honour, and with whose genesis I have had something to do, will cease to be read and eventually cease to be remembered."¹⁷⁷ Considering the transience of fame, she argues that even the British Museum, understood as a depository of the greatest achievements of humanity, will disappear one day. Her feeling of mortality reinforces her sympathy for animals which are killed without any concern for their lives. It can be claimed that Lurie follows Costello's moral progress, although in a reverse order as it is first through his exposure to animal death that he eventually comes to terms with his own mortality.¹⁷⁸

When Costello evokes the GOD-DOG anagram in "At the Gate," she is having a vision of an old, lion-colored dog stretched at an entrance beyond which there is "a desert

174 Cf. Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, chap. 12.

175 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 63.

176 Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Robin Waterford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 207-210.

177 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 20.

178 Northover, "J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy," 64-76.

of sand and stone, to infinity.”¹⁷⁹ Northover argues that the dog from Costello's vision recalls Argus, Odysseus' dog that has awaited his master's return for nineteen years, only to die after finally seeing him. Assuming that Driepoot is an Argus-like figure, it can be claimed that Lurie is also at the end of his journey. By journey one should understand the Odyssean type of search for meaning, preceded by hedonistic abandon, pride, vanity, participation in slaughter, and infliction of pain and sorrow on others. While for Costello the end of the journey stands for death, for Lurie it means a new life. Significantly, his is a life defined by the reality of death, by the fact that denial or ignorance of death desensitizes one to the vulnerability of life, as happened in the Holocaust and still happens in the slaughterhouses. By killing Driepoot, Lurie brings animal death to light, thus exposing the value of life in general, whether human or non-human. In this sense, he resembles Costello, who calls herself “a secretary of the invisible,”¹⁸⁰ that is, of the weak and less privileged, and especially of all the animals slaughtered silently out of human sight and through ignorance of the value of life.

Similarly to Costello, Lurie learns to listen to animals. Faced with Petrus's sheep, he only heard their annoying bleating; later, he almost hears Driepoot sing in his opera; yet the most significant seems to be the attention he gives to the euthanized dogs. When disposing of their bodies, Lurie does not talk to anyone; withdrawn and concentrated solely on the task, he appears as if he was respecting the burned dogs with silence. His silence seems informed by Wittgenstein's theory of language games, according to which human words distort animal suffering; therefore, in order to minimize the distortion, one should remain silent. Not only does he recognize the individuality of animal life, but he also shows respect for animals as independent agents.

At the end of the novel, when asked by Bev Shaw to confirm his decision to euthanize

179 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 245.

180 Ibid., 199.

Driepoot, he answers, “Yes, I am giving him up.”¹⁸¹ The silence is removed. By using the pronoun “I,” he symbolically appropriates the voice of the dog. In the Derridean paradigm, such a gesture forces the animal into the order of language, and makes it subordinate to humans. It is worth noting that this is the second silencing of Driepoot; the first one happens in the clinic backyard where, working on his opera, Lurie plays a banjo. He notices that Driepoot reacts to the music; “the dog smacks its lips and seems on the point of singing too, or howling.”¹⁸² Lurie considers including the dog in his opera but then he gives up the idea. It could be argued that he refuses to give voice to the dog in order to confirm his power over animals. However, Sundhya Walther, a University of Toronto scholar, claims that the gesture reflects Lurie’s general tendency to dominate not only animals but also women and other races. She claims that “bringing Driepoot to the very edge of entering human cultural representation on his own terms, by ‘howling,’ and then foreclosing the possibility of that voice, Lurie makes of the dog the perfect sacrifice that he could never quite make of the languaged female of his own species.”¹⁸³ In Walther’s view, Lurie’s actions seem aimed at perpetuating an idealized vision of himself and forcing it onto others.

As well as silencing Driepoot, Lurie “hear[s] no female voice”¹⁸⁴; he ignores Soraya’s request not to interfere with her personal life, nor does he acknowledge Melanie’s antipathy to him. Lurie also seems to silence Lucy, especially when she tries to oppose his domination. She claims: “[y]ou behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn’t make an appearance until halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. I am not minor. I have a life of my own.”¹⁸⁵ Lurie answers by calling her attempt to

181 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 220.

182 Ibid., 215.

183 Walther, “Refusing to Speak: The Ethics of Animal Silence and Sacrifice in Coetzee and Derrida,” *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* (University of Toronto Press) 12, no. 3 (2014): 89.

184 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 52.

185 Ibid., 198.

assert her own subjectivity an “eruption.”¹⁸⁶ Silencing Lucy is comparable to his decision not to include Driepoot in the opera; as Walther argues, both these silencings establish Lurie’s domination over other voices through his continued hold on their narratives. Apparently, Lurie mutes other people to reinforce his sense of superiority.

The above, negative reading of Lurie's silencing can be countered by mentioning the fact that he eventually admits Lucy's voice. Before their last encounter, Lurie silently observes Lucy at work in her garden. At the same time, he admires her adaptability to the circumstances, hoping that she will eventually recover from her trauma. Then he calls her but she does not hear him. Now it is Lurie who is muted, not by another person, but by the simplicity of the observed scene:

The wind drops. There is a moment of utter stillness which he would wish prolonged for ever: the gentle sun, the stillness of mid-afternoon, bees busy in a field of flowers; and at the centre of the picture a young woman, *das ewig Weibliche*, lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat. A scene ready-made for a Sargent or a Bonnard. City boys like him; but even city boys can recognize beauty when they see it, can have their breath taken away.¹⁸⁷

Literally, he is silenced because his breath is taken away by the beauty of the scene he observes. He does not judge; instead, he sympathizes with his daughter who cherishes life, despite the harm done to her in the past and her uncertain future. Lurie appears to be overwhelmed by the emergence of his sympathetic imagination.

When he calls out again, Lucy spots him, and “[t]he spell is broken.”¹⁸⁸ On the one hand, the “spell” could be interpreted as Lurie's emotion caused by the beauty of the observed scene. On the other hand, however, the spell metaphor might refer to Lurie's proprietary view of women, his fetishization of instrumentalist rationality, and his disbelief in moral transformation. By saying that the spell is broken, he could mean an end of his

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 198.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 218 (emphasis original).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

former unsympathetic self. Lucy's last words in the novel are words of invitation, which reinforces the idea of a new start. The claim that Lurie silences his daughter may thus be thought an exaggeration. Lucy is an independent and self-assured character who never succumbs to her father. She falls victim of a rape, she seems to concede to Petrus, but she never does to Lurie.

It is also questionable whether Lurie silences animals. He may not include Driepoot in his opera, but on a more positive reading Driepoot's noises at the sound of Lurie's banjo could be interpreted as a form of animal approval of the new, more humble version of the opera. Thus Lurie's final abandonment of the opera may at least partially be attributed to the dog's influence. Driepoot speaks in a similar way to the hen which, according to Elizabeth Costello's account in *The Lives of Animals*, spoke through Albert Camus by inspiring him to campaign against violence, and eventually led to the abolition of the death penalty in France. Driepoot's voice is heard through Lurie's sympathetic imagination both for Teresa and for Lucy.¹⁸⁹

In his 2001 article, Mike Marais claims that Coetzee uses Lurie's fixation on upholding the integrity of his selfhood to demonstrate that Costello's idea of the sympathetic imagination presents serious problems for a redemptive reading of *Disgrace*. In his view, Lurie's appropriation of another's voice, both human and animal, disrupts Costello's definition of animal silence as a form of "heroic" resistance to animals' abuse by people. It could be argued that the tenet of Coetzee's novel is not Lurie's progression from ignorance toward more advanced insight into the perspectives of another, but rather "the interruptions of all of those narrative non-Luries who introduce fissures into his [Lurie's] narrative control."¹⁹⁰ On such a reading, Lurie is a counterexample, and *Disgrace* features a story narrated from the point of view of a failed sympathetic imaginer. Marais

189 Walther, "Refusing to Speak," 86.

190 Ibid., 90.

claims that Lurie does change to some extent, yet the change serves his self-projected elitism, and that he should be perceived as the epitome of unsuccessful sympathetic imagination.¹⁹¹

The above Derridean reading of Coetzee's work challenges the formerly presented Kantian understanding. The discrepancy between the two interpretations depends on whether the reader of *Disgrace* perceives Lurie's involvement with animals as a symbolic renunciation of his former self or, on the contrary, as its perverse reinforcement. Considering Lurie's hopes about his grandfatherhood, the emotions of love and admiration he feels at seeing Lucy working in the garden, his acceptance of being just a visitor in her life, and the acknowledgement of his inability to render Teresa's point of view in his opera, it can be argued that the Kantian reading is more appropriate. Although imperfectly, Lurie does change his attitude to the other, and his transformation can be explained in terms of the Kantian paradigm of human moral development through practice, constant striving for self-perfection, and respect for animals as if they were moral subjects.

Conclusion

A significant similarity between Kant and Coetzee concerns their attempts to base the principles of morality outside Christian ethics. While Kant based his ethics on reason, especially on its transcendental application, Coetzee relies on the body, in particular on the feeling of individual embodiment. The concepts of charity, sympathy, and love as depicted in Coetzee's work are based on the idea of a shared bodily experience and the associated sense of mortality which enable mutual insight, reciprocity and understanding between people and other beings. It is due to his secular project of basing ethics on the bodily that

191 Mike Marais, "Impossible Possibilities: Ethics and Choice in J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* and *Disgrace*," *English Academy Review* 18, no. 1 (2001): 15

Coetzee includes animals in moral consideration. To use the anagram from “At the Gate,” Coetzee proposes DOG, rather than GOD, as a path to moral development, thus echoing Kant's claim that treating animals as if they were moral subjects may be conducive to the improvement of one's character.

In Coetzee's view, the sympathetic imagination is an effective manner of improving one's morality as long as it appeals to the idea of shared embodiment. As Elizabeth Costello argues, because people and animals are bodily beings, it is possible for man to imagine animals' experience and, in turn, to sympathize with them. Embodiment not only enables sympathy, but also lends credibility to it. Consequently, apart from being capable of insight into the mental states of animals, people can also develop their moral character due to that insight.

People may turn to secular ethics by personally experiencing bodily pain and suffering (the Magistrate), approaching their own death (Elizabeth Curren), or the death of someone they love (Dostoevsky), by sustaining bodily injury (Paul Rayment), or by witnessing animal torment (Elizabeth Costello and David Lurie). That puts animals in the position of scapegoats, or “the bearers of human sin,”¹⁹² primarily because they do not have the concept of violence, and so cannot defend themselves against it. In Coetzee's view, imagining animals' predicament stimulates sympathy for them and, by extension, for people. Such seems to be the sense of the scene from *The Master of Petersburg* in which Dostoevsky gets annoyed by a dog howling at night but, unable to silence the animal, he soon realizes that he will have to tolerate it unless he wants to abandon his investigation into the death of his son, Pavel, and symbolically betray his ideal of paternal love. Relating Dostoevsky's reflection to Coetzee's idea of moral growth through exposure to animals, Marais argues as follows: “[w]hile this encounter *does not* lead to Dostoevsky's assumption of responsibility for the dog, it does suggest that non-human animals are able

192 Northover, “J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy,” 246.

to place humans under obligation.”¹⁹³

Despite his respect for animal value, Coetzee avoids idealizing animals; the dogs on Lucy's farm are “watch dogs,”¹⁹⁴ meaning that they embody the racist ideology of apartheid. They are bred and kept to protect the white minority by deterring black people. Significantly, Katy attacks Pollux but tolerates Lurie, even though they are both strangers to her. Her behavior symbolizes the racial prejudice of their white owners. Describing incidents of dog pack attacks, Coetzee does not romanticize dogs, nor does he anthropomorphize them by presenting their point of view, or by dismissing their natural aggressiveness. Reflecting on Coetzee's lack of illusions about dogs' nature, Northover claims that “the dogs should not simply be seen as representing aspects of human nature, and it is in respecting their singularity that Lurie achieves his salvation,”¹⁹⁵ the background for his respect being the sympathetic imagination.

Coetzee designates the sympathetic imagination as a vital means toward engendering weakly anthropocentric animal ethics. He exposes the limitations of the notion in its Romantic understanding, and he further approaches it along the logic of Kant's transcendental illusion, claiming that a successful insight into the animal perspective depends on recognizing imagination as a reliable source of knowledge. In this sense, apart from setting a ground for animal ethics, Coetzee also defines fiction as a means to genuine moral instruction. Accordingly, a number of his novels, among them *The Lives of Animals*, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Disgrace*, can be treated as ways of stimulating people's sympathetic imagination and engendering their sensitivity to animal suffering.

Following Kant's conception of moral education, Coetzee identifies concern for animals both as an exercise in morality and as a step toward refining one's humanity. Although incomplete, Lurie's concern for animal suffering makes him gradually abandon

193 Marais, “The Possibility of Ethical Action: J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*,” 8-9 (emphasis original).

194 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 60.

195 Northover, “J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy,” 305.

his numerous prejudices, including his racial bias and his feeling of patriarchal superiority to women. In accordance with Kant's teachings, Lurie improves his humanity by practicing his morals on animals, a type of animal ethics that can be qualified as weakly anthropocentric. Another similarity to Kant involves Coetzee's emphasis on the universal character of ethical claims; respect for animals should stem from one's good will, not from an external obligation. It could be argued that Coetzee distributes his ethical ideal among his characters. Indeed, Eugene Dawn, Joll, Dostoevsky and Elizabeth Curren stand for his criticism of techno-analytical rationalism; the role of Michael K is to criticize non-rationalism; Elizabeth Costello introduces the idea of sympathetic imagination; David Lurie represents the educative ideals and also critique of utilitarian rationalism; and Raul Rayment can be regarded as a counterexample of good will and moral genuineness. Lurie and the Magistrate epitomize the possibilities of one's growth as a human being. Significantly, Coetzee includes animals in his profoundly humanistic discourse for deeply ethical reasons, and Kant can be perceived as a theoretical background on which Coetzee's pro-animal views can be based.

CONCLUSION

The Kantian aspects of John Maxwell Coetzee's animal ethics can be identified in his critique of the rationalistic reliance on thought experiments, in his rejection of reason as the basis for deciding about one's moral considerability, and in his notion of the sympathetic imagination as a paralogical component of the wider conception of rationality. Throughout his work, Coetzee exposes reason as dissimulating violence against less privileged members of society, both human and non-human. In *The Lives of Animals*, *Elizabeth Costello*, and *Disgrace*, he investigates the possibilities of the sympathetic imagination for counteracting the abuse of animals. He also addresses the limitations of the sympathetic imagination, testing its applicability not only across species, but also across gender, age, and disability, the latter especially in *Slow Man*. In the present thesis, it has been argued that in Coetzee's work the sympathetic imagination is presented as a supplement to rational thinking, extending the application of moral value to animals. In the thesis, the paralogical nature of the sympathetic imagination has been compared to the logic of Kant's transcendental illusion.

The comparison has been derived from the fact that sympathy for animals cannot be caused by an actual knowledge of the mental states of animals but only by an assumption of such states. The assumption is inevitable because it is impossible for people to access the minds of animals. Despite the impossibility, however, people rely on the assumption when they interact with animals. Without the assumption, the interaction would be impossible, or at least significantly limited. Interestingly enough, Kant's transcendental illusion refers to a similar mechanism: it is impossible to pass universally valid claims on the basis of sole experience, but because only experience delivers reliable knowledge, reason *a priori* presupposes the validity of empirical knowledge, thus granting the integrity

of its own claims. Coetzee's animal ethics and Kant's epistemology rely on the preliminary assumption that the conditions of their possibility are fulfilled, without any objective proof for the fulfillment. Accordingly, echoing the logic of Kant's transcendental illusion, Coetzee assumes that animal suffering is real, and that people can correctly interpret animal predicament by means of an imaginative insight.

The other parallel with Kant involves Coetzee's emphasis on good will. It has been argued that Coetzee's animal ethics can be classified as weakly anthropocentric because, as Tom Herron maintains, they are not “a manifesto of animal rights”¹ but rather of a close relationship between people and animals, disavowed by strictly rationalist ways of thinking. The reason for Coetzee's animal ethics does not seem to be animals themselves but man, specifically people's humanity, which Coetzee perceives as correlated with the treatment of the weaker, among them animals. Accordingly, Coetzee has Costello admit that her pro-animal outlook, manifested in her vegetarianism, “comes out of a desire to save [her] soul,”² that is, not necessarily to protect animals, but rather to save her own humanity. Similarly to Kant, Coetzee designates moral treatment of animals as a factor enhancing the morality of humans; man's duty to animals neither derives from their moral status, nor from their rights, but predominantly from the privileged status people have as species, one of the privileges being the ability to imaginatively introspect the mental states of other beings, among them animals. Another privilege is free will which can become good should the introspection be adopted as the basis of one's moral outlook. Kant claimed that good will was the measure of man's humanity. In his view, exercising good could lead to an enhancement of one's humanity. It has been argued that Coetzee resonates with such a vision of Kant's ethics.

1 Tom Herron, “The Dog Man: Becoming Animal in Coetzee's *Disgrace*,” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 473.

2 John Maxwell Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 43.

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee has Lurie engage in a pro-animal activity for no personal gain, thus evoking the Kantian notion of disinterestedness. In Kant's view, disinterestedness connects aesthetics with ethics. As he claimed, the sole reason for being moral is morality itself; similarly, the only cause for engaging with beauty is beauty itself. Kant did not argue for the sameness of beauty and morality, however. Instead, he maintained that beauty and morality evoke similar mental processes, therefore, one's exposure to beautiful things, either in nature or in art, might be conducive to improving one's morality. Coetzee's view of literature's role in encouraging people's moral growth can be compared with the Kantian idea of artistic beauty. In *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee defines literature as a source of moral guidance:

What I mean to say is that in our truest reading, as students, we searched the page for guidance, guidance in perplexity. We found it in Lawrence, or we found it in Eliot, the early Eliot: a different kind of guidance, perhaps, but guidance nevertheless in how to live our lives. [...] If the humanities want to survive, surely it is those energies and that craving for guidance that they must respond to: a craving that is, in the end, a quest for salvation.³

However, in his 2004 short story, "As a Woman Grows Older," Coetzee doubts whether beauty can have the effects Kant referred to:

The question I find myself asking now is, What good has it done me, all this beauty? Is beauty not just another consumable, like wine? One drinks it in, one drinks it down, it gives one a brief, pleasing, heady feeling, but what does it leave behind? The residue of wine is, excuse the word, piss; what is the residue of beauty? What is the good of it? Does beauty make us better people?⁴

Reacting to the above self-criticism by Costello is her daughter, Helen, who assures her mother of the connection between beauty and morality:

[...] what you have produced as a writer not only has a beauty of its own – a

3 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (2003; London: Vintage, 2004), 127.

4 John Maxwell Coetzee, "As a Woman Grows Older," *The New York Review of Books* 51, no. 1 (2004), <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2004/01/15/as-a-woman-grows-older/>.

limited beauty, granted, it is not poetry, but beauty nevertheless, shapeliness, clarity, economy – but has also changed the lives of others, made them better human beings, or slightly better human beings. It is not just I who say so. Other people say so too [...]. Not because what you write contains lessons but because it is a lesson. You teach people how to feel. By dint of grace. The grace of the pen as it follows the movements of thought.⁵

Remembering that Coetzee compares writing to mastering sport, it could be argued that, in his view, literature supplies an opportunity to train one's morality, which echoes Kant's idea that, in addition to guidance, morality requires constant practice.

Another important reference to Kant is Coetzee's comparison between violence to animals and to human beings, especially to people of different ethnicity, women, and children. Argues Rosemary Jolly: “[t]he war on women in South Africa occupies the same discursive space as the war on animals in Elizabeth Costello’s discourse.”⁶ In her 2004 essay “‘Miracles of Creation’: Animals in J. M. Coetzee’s Work,” Josephine Donovan claims that the correlation between the ignorance of animals' suffering and the lack of concern for people occurs throughout Coetzee's work; referring to *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Elizabeth Costello*, and *Disgrace*, she claims that “Costello theorizes the attitude the Magistrate and David Lurie inarticulately exhibit, namely, that moral awareness depends upon a kind of visceral empathy.”⁷ The strongest link between deficient morality and animal abuse seems to be the moment of Lucy's rape when the assailants kill her dogs out of mere spite toward white people. Clearly, Coetzee's association of meat-eating with violence, implied among others by Bev Shaw, correlates with the Kantian link between violence to animals and the degeneration of humanity.⁸

5 Coetzee, “As a Woman Grows Older,” 12.

6 Rosemary Jolly, “Going to the Dogs: Humanity in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, *The Lives of Animals*, and South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” in *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, ed. Jane Poyner (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 166.

7 Josephine Donovan, “‘Miracles of Creation’: Animals in J. M. Coetzee's Work,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 43, no. 1 (2004): 85.

8 Cf. Richard Alan Northover, “J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy” (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2009), 265, <http://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/24686/00front.pdf?sequence=1>.

Coetzee's insistence on approaching animals as individual beings, not as a generic mass, could be perceived as another aspect of Kantian ethics in Coetzee work. However, Kant valued only individual sentient beings, thus excluding animals from moral consideration as non-sentient. Accordingly, despite significant similarities, there are numerous discrepancies between Coetzee's animal ethics and Kantian humanism. As already noted, Coetzee does not argue for animal rights. Unlike Kant, he is not a deontologist,⁹ therefore, arguing for a moral treatment of animals, he does not refer to the ethics of duty. Rather, he seems to follow Mary Midgley's ethics of care, referenced in the footnotes to *The Lives of Animals*. Significantly, Midgley bases her theory in opposition to Kant:

The idea of a person in the almost technical sense required by morality today is the one worked out by Kant in his *Foundations of the Metaphysic of Morals*. It is the idea of a rational being, capable of choice and therefore endowed with dignity, worthy of respect, having rights; one that must be regarded always as an end in itself, not only as a means to the ends of others. [...] Now, if intelligence is really so important to the issue, a certain vertigo descends when we ask, 'Where do we draw the line?' because intelligence is a matter of degree. Some inhabitants of our own planet, including whales and dolphins, have turned out to be a lot brighter than was once supposed.¹⁰

Coetzee does not reject reason itself, but similarly to Midgley, he questions its privileged status above other faculties, including emotion, will, and imagination. Questioning abstract and self-righteous rationalism, he does not merely reverse the dominant position of reason, but rather he treats it as one of the elements composing human cognitive apparatus. Coetzee's diminishing of reason's status seems in stark contrast with Kant's absolutist view of reason.

Accordingly, the similarities between Coetzee's animal ethics and Kant's moral philosophy are based on a favorable, but not uncritical, reading of Kant's ideas. One of the

⁹ Antony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (London: Pan Books, 1979) 88-89.

¹⁰ Mary Midgley, "Persons and Non-persons," in *In Defence of Animals*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 56. Also available at <http://www.animal-rights-library.com/texts-m/midgley01.htm>.

most frequently recalled factor differentiating Coetzee from Kant has been the latter's speciesist use of the criterion of rationality for denying moral consideration for animals, i.e., for treating them like things. In Kant's view, the ultimate moral value resides only in the good will of persons, that is, in autonomous individuals capable of making moral choices because of their rationality. Since only human beings can be persons, Kant claimed that only people deserved respect, that is, they ought to be treated as ends, not merely as means. On the other hand, animals, incapable of being persons, are outside of the moral community, meaning that they can be used as means.¹¹ A reference to Coetzee's criticism of Kantian speciesism can be inferred from the following words by Lucy: "They do us the honour of treating us like gods, and we respond by treating them like things."¹² Northover interprets Lucy's words as Coetzee's direct "reference to the distinction made by Kant [...] between persons and things, persons having moral status, and animals, being classified as non-persons, having none, being treated instead as possessions and property."¹³

However, on a reading more favorable for Kant, the above-quoted excerpt can be interpreted as Coetzee's criticism of the volition of the Kantian precept of treating animals as if they were moral subjects. Lucy does not argue for moral treatment of animals derived from their rights; instead, she seems to relate people's duty to animals to the sense of their community with other beings. Nor does Coetzee ask to treat animals as persons; rather, he encourages to approach them individually as beings in their own right, without concealing their animal nature, either by reproducing their point of view in his literature or by imposing on them any rights. Occasionally, however, he does depict animals as if they were persons. A notable example is Driepoot, considered by Lurie as a character in his

11 Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington, 3rd ed. (1785; Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 9.

12 John Maxwell Coetzee, *Disgrace* (1999; New York: Vintage, 2000), 78.

13 Northover, "J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights," 263.

chamber opera. However, Driepoot's voice is denied in order to avoid imposing on him the *l'animot* type of anthropocentric misrepresentation. In contrast to Northover, it can be argued that, in his criticism of people's treatment of animals as possessions, Coetzee seems to approach, rather than to oppose Kant.

Another factor evoking the discrepancy between Coetzee and the Kantian emphasis on autonomy and reason-based individualism concerns Coetzee's endorsement of environmentalist values in *Disgrace*. Lucy is presented as an embodiment of self-sustainability. She has an admirable ability to adapt to changing conditions. An expression of her versatility is her persistence in running her farm even though it is under threat of recurring attacks. In order to stay on the land, she is ready to renounce her deed to it, waiving its ownership to her neighbor Petrus. It can be claimed that she considers herself an element of a greater whole, whether social, natural, or even political, thus representing the holistic environmental ethics, that is, the eco-ethical view that the environment is a system of connected parts which have more value together than separately.

Lucy's ecological way of life is presented in opposition to the atomized lifestyle of her other neighbor, an aging farmer of German descent named Ettinger, who trusts only instrumental reason, who believes in the power of violence, and who antagonizes, rather than sympathizes with others. He is adamant about watching the boundaries of his possessions. As a narrow-minded rationalist, he reminds of hyper-rationalist Eugene Dawn from *Dusklands*. In a sense, Ettinger is an opposite not only of Lucy, but also of Michael K who, during his stay on the Visagie farm, seems to literally merge with the environment. Referring to his separatist lifestyle, Lucy reflects that “[i]t is just a matter of time before Ettinger is found with a bullet in his back.”¹⁴ His self-centered atomism can be perceived as the opposite of Lucy's holism.

Exploring the possibilities of a respectful treatment of animals, Coetzee does not

¹⁴ Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 204.

resort to animal rights because, as in any other relation of dominance and subservience, that would mean imposing on animals human categories, thereby reinforcing the speciesism of *l'animot*. Similarly to Midgley, Coetzee relates moral considerability for individual animals to the fact that all living beings are embodied creatures. In this sense, he establishes a continuity between humans and non-humans. Moreover, Coetzee's emphasis on the value of each embodied life aligns him with Tom Regan and, indirectly, with Peter Singer, with whom he shares the claim that rationality is not the necessary basis of moral value. Therefore, considering the pro-ecological subtext of *Disgrace*, Coetzee's stance in the environmental discourse can be ascribed to individualist environmental ethics. Because he recognizes man as the source of animal ethics, he could also be assigned to weakly anthropocentric ethics, theorized by Dale Jamieson, Bryan G. Norton, Eugene Hargrove.

It is worth mentioning that Coetzee opposes the deep ecologist idea that the value of the environment surpasses the interests of individual beings, both human and non-human. His criticism of deep ecology can be identified in *The Life and Times of Michael K*, in which the titular Michael K almost dies because of his immersion in the environment. Apart from deep ecology, Coetzee seems to reject the stance defined as holistic environmentalism. In *The Lives of Animals*, he has Thomas O'Hearne, a fictional philosopher, voice the most radical ideas of environmentalism:

Therefore it is quite appropriate that we should agitate for the humane treatment of animals, even and particularly in the slaughterhouses. This has for a long time been the goal of animal welfare organizations, and I salute them for it.¹⁵

Apart from his self-contradictory claim that slaughterhouses, that is, places devoted to exploitation and killing defenseless beings, can be humane, O'Hearne pictures hunters as animal lovers, and animal-rights activists as naive and abstracted utopians, and the English

¹⁵ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 64.

countryside as “less attractive without its customary flocks and herds fattening themselves as they wait to die.”¹⁶ O’Hearne is presented as a relativist who perceives the animal-rights movement as “yet another Western crusade against the rest of the world, claiming universality for what are simply its own standards.”¹⁷ In his view, the pro-animal discourse misrepresents animals by projecting on them typically human ideas and categories, such as the horror of death. Coetzee references the claims pronounced by O’Hearne mostly to Michael P. T. Leahy (b. 1934), a University of Kent scholar, author of *Against Liberation*, a 1991 study favoring pro-exploitative, instrumental, and predominantly managerial approach to animals. Employing Wittgenstein’s theory of language games, Leahy maintains that due to their lack of language, animals cannot be considered as moral subject, therefore, they should not be treated as human equals. Interestingly, calling upon the Kantian urge to care for animals, Leahy argues for a rational management of natural resources, including wild and stock animals, as it would benefit human societies.¹⁸ Recalling the distinction made in Chapter I, Leahy can be defined as a proponent of the cornucopian view of nature.

Irritated by O’Hearne’s speciesism, Costello loses her patience, abruptly rejecting his arguments: “What sort of philosophy is this? Throw it out, I say. What good do its piddling distinctions do? [...] I would not fall over myself to break bread with him.”¹⁹ Accordingly, Costello takes care to separate animal ethics from environmentalism, repudiating ecological arguments as morally decisive. To support her claim, Coetzee makes a footnote reference to Rosemary Rodd, a British environmental ethicist, who in her 1990 study entitled *Biology, Ethics and Animals* criticizes the tendency to treat animals only as part of nature.²⁰ Significantly, in “The Poets and the Animals,” Costello’s son, John, refers to her

16 Ibid., 66.

17 Ibid., 60.

18 See Michael P. T. Leahy, *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), ch. 8.

19 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 66.

20 Rosemary Rodd, *Biology, Ethics and Animals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), ch. 5.

criticism of the abstractness of environmentalist ideas as “antiecologism.”²¹ The core of Costello's critique is the ecologist devaluation of the individuality of animals:

The irony is a terrible one. An ecological philosophy that tells us to live side by side with other creatures justifies itself by appealing to an idea, an idea of a higher order than any living creature. An idea, finally – and this is the crushing twist to the irony – which no creature except Man is capable of comprehending. Every living creature fights for its own, individual life, refuses, by fighting, to accede to the idea that the salmon or the gnat is of a lower order of importance than the idea of the salmon or the idea of the gnat. But when we see the salmon fighting for its life, we say, it is just programmed to fight; we say, with Aquinas, it is locked into natural slavery; we say, it lacks self-consciousness.²²

Coetzee criticizes the ecologist approach to animals as “Platonic,”²³ that is, as holistic and abstract, maintaining that it projects people as the only beings capable of comprehending nature, and of managing animal lives, population, and even demise.²⁴

Therefore, the apparent rejection of ecologism in *The Lives of Animals* can be attributed to Coetzee's criticism of utilitarian reason, manifesting itself in the managerial mode, instances of which could be identified in the conservation movement, recycling, and the search for renewable sources of energy, all for a more efficient management of resources. It is noteworthy at this point that Coetzee makes Costello refer to the environmentalists who are preoccupied with nature as a whole, not as a community of individual beings, that is, as “the managers of ecology.”²⁵ She also refers to ecological philosophers as mere “managers,” implicitly setting them in opposition to artists, poets, and other people resorting to the sympathetic imagination.²⁶

Despite his criticism of speciesism, especially of the exploitation of animals for the purposes of human economic gain, Coetzee's animal ethics is anthropogenic in the sense that it originates with the human ability to sympathize with the other. It is also weakly

²¹ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 55.

²² Ibid., 54.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See Northover, “J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights,” 20-22, 54.

²⁵ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 54.

²⁶ Northover, “J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights,” 213.

anthropocentric as, in Coetzee's view, man's treatment of animals is a measure of man's own humanity. The weak anthropocentrism of Coetzee's animal ethics corresponds to the Kantian idea that respect for animals improves moral attitudes of humans.

Coetzee follows Kant's rule of reciprocity, and he also accords the sympathetic imagination with the Kantian logic of transcendental illusion. Similarly to Kant, Coetzee criticizes pure reason and academic rationalism, opting for a wider conception of rationality in which there is room for paralogical modes of cognitive insight, among them intuition, emotion, and sympathy. Coetzee strives for a discursive reason. Moreover, he draws upon the formative function of art, particularly literature. In his view, literature stimulates sensibility, improving empathy and compassion. Following Kant, he implies that artistic involvement develops moral character. Most of his literary output seems motivated by the belief that it will stimulate people's sensibility to others' harm and their sense of injustice. Coetzee's special concern are animals. While he admits that his efforts, especially with reference to the efficacy of the sympathetic imagination, may have limited effect with respect to gender, race, and disability, he appears more positive about its results when it comes to animals. On numerous occasions, especially in *Disgrace*, he shows that moral behavior begins with animals, complying with Leszek Kołakowski's assertion that morality is determined by the treatment of the weakest. Coetzee's idea that one's treatment of animals is a benchmark of one's morality also conforms to the Lyotardian claim that animals are perfect victims because they never oppose oppression. For Coetzee, animal ethics is both a prerequisite and a consequence of human morality. Therefore, while it may be an exaggeration to claim that Coetzee is a Kantian, the present dissertation has nonetheless demonstrated that in many aspects he espouses or closely approximates to the tenets of Kant's philosophy, among them the duty to strive for perfection in humanity through morally approvable treatment of animals.

Despite numerous differences between them, Coetzee appears to share Kant's admiration for the possibilities of human mind. Having Elizabeth Costello say that there are no bounds to "the sympathetic imagination,"²⁷ he is in fact acknowledging the power of reason, manifesting itself in its ability to recognize not only humans but also animals as objects of moral consideration. Taking into account the volitional character of the sympathetic imagination, as distinct from the instinctive, subconscious, or reflexive nature of empathy, Coetzee seems to comply with the Kantian argument that morality originates in one's good will. The other similarity between Coetzee and Kant is their shared recognition that beauty, either in the form of natural sites or of human artistic expression, as well as the treatment of animals stimulate the growth of morality through the exercise of imagination.

At the close of his study of Coetzee's work, Northover argues that "it is through the recognition of our kinship with animals that we discover our humanity."²⁸ In Coetzee's work, the discovery has a Kantian overtone, i.e., unlike animals, people have duty to better themselves, either by improving their own moral character or by encouraging the moral improvement of others. The duty can be realized through literature. While the author can enhance the reader's moral outlook by delivering engaging characters, the audience can stimulate their moral sensitivity by introspecting the characters's motivations, emotions, and mindsets through the use of the sympathetic imagination.

It is through the exercise of the sympathetic imagination, an exclusively human ability, that Coetzee conveys his arguably most important idea. In *The Childhood of Jesus* (2010), David, a boy standing for the titular Jesus, asks his caretaker, an elderly man named Simón, "why are we here?" Simón answers: "[w]e are here for the same reason everyone else is. We have been given a chance to live and we have accepted that chance. It

²⁷ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 35

²⁸ Northover, "J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights," 370.

is a great thing, to live. It is the greatest of all.”²⁹ The aim of the present dissertation has been to show that Coetzee's praise for life concerns both humans and animals. Due to its focus on human morality, the praise is weakly anthropocentric, yet exceeding human speciesism along the lines of Kant's precept for improving one's humanity through a morally appropriate treatment of animals.

The ultimate value of humanity which Coetzee seems to rely on and cultivate in his work is the ability to realize the worth of life, whether through reason, sympathetic imagination, or through any other cognitive faculty. Consequently, that leads him to appreciate life in every living being, both human and non-human. The realization of life's value means equalizing man's status with that of other creatures, but instead of perceiving the equalization as a loss, Coetzee presents it as a factor approaching people to a community with other earthlings and, hopefully, to a positive solution to the impending crisis of sustainability.

²⁹ John Maxwell Coetzee, *The Childhood of Jesus* (New York: Viking, 2013), 17.

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Appendix

Waiting for the Barbarians (1904)

-What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum?

The barbarians are due here today.

-Why isn't anything going on in the senate?

Why are the senators sitting there without legislating?

Because the barbarians are coming today.

What's the point of senators making laws now?

Once the barbarians are here, they'll do the legislating.

-Why did our emperor get up so early,
and why is he sitting enthroned at the city's main gate,
in state, wearing the crown?

Because the barbarians are coming today

and the emperor's waiting to receive their leader.

He's even got a scroll to give him,
loaded with titles, with imposing names.

-Why have our two consuls and praetors come out today
wearing their embroidered, their scarlet togas?

Why have they put on bracelets with so many amethysts,
rings sparkling with magnificent emeralds?

Why are they carrying elegant canes
beautifully worked in silver and gold?

Because the barbarians are coming today
and things like that dazzle the barbarians.

-Why don't our distinguished orators turn up as usual
to make their speeches, say what they have to say?

Because the barbarians are coming today

and they're bored by rhetoric and public speaking.

-Why this sudden bewilderment, this confusion?

(How serious people's faces have become.)

Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly,
everyone going home lost in thought?

Because night has fallen and the barbarians haven't come.

And some of our men who have just returned from the border say
there are no barbarians any longer.

Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians?

Those people were a kind of solution.

Constantine P. Cavafy